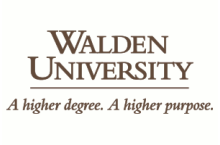

2021

Content Analysis of Ethics Curriculum Requirements in Undergraduate Social Work Programs

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Debra Evonne Thrower

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

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by

Debra Evonne Thrower

MSW, University of South Florida, 1997

BSW, University of South Florida, 1992

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

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February 2021

Abstract

Due to recent mandates of the 2015 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards, social work ethics education has received considerable attention. These standards have increased the focus on ethical education requirements in bachelor's and master's curricula. However, research regarding approaches that undergraduate institutions use to implement the required content remains limited. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine ethics education requirements in the syllabi from practice courses at CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. Common morality theory and curriculum theory were theoretical frameworks that guided examination of the phenomenon. Data were collected from 51 syllabi at public and private institutions for the content analysis of ethics curriculum from 19 bachelor-level social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. Data were analyzed using open coding. Findings were organized into patterns related to CSWE Competency 1 and practice behaviors in course syllabi, course content, and dimensions. Findings indicated that programs demonstrated frequent representation of CSWE Competency 1 and practice behaviors related to ethics content in methods courses. Programs most frequently represented Competency 1 and practice behaviors through course readings, assignments, class activities, and case studies. The findings may contribute to positive social change through furthering the commitment to ethics education in undergraduate social work programs and to student preparedness for ethical practice with contemporary social work challenges.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my late parents, Elijah Timothy and Mary Katherine Thrower, who live with me in spirit; my late paternal grandparents, Elijah and Ethel Thrower, and late maternal grandparents, Floyd and Ordarett Lee Hegler and Eve V. Hegler (step-grandmother); and late brother, Charles Michael Benford. To my dearest cousin, Dr. Rufus Thrower, Jr., your encouragement has been delightful. To all of my siblings; my daughter's father, Christopher Dale Tatum; and our daughter, Ashley Sha'Nail Benford, and our granddaughter, Kennedy Sha'Nail McDonald, your constant love and patience have sustained me in difficult and good times. Other dedications include Shirley Chan and Ralphena Q. Taylor-Collins for their guidance in higher education. I also want to dedicate this study to Dr. Paulette Walker for her availability, and Dr. C-Lamt Ho for his inspiration, as well as my student success advisor doctoral specialist, Catherine Heck, for unyielding support. Last, but not least, I want to thank the deans, chairs, and directors for their support.

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I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for his grace and mercy during this spiritual and natural journey at Walden University. I also want to thank my chair, Dr. Debora Rice; my methodologist, Dr. Alice Yick; and my university research reviewer, Dr. Sean Hogan. This study would not be complete without my committee members.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Ethics curriculum requirements in undergraduate social work programs play a vital role for students entering generalist practice. Scholars suggested that there are multiple approaches to present ethics education to graduate-level social work students (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). However, there is a gap in the literature about how the approaches to ethics education are applied to bachelor-level social work students. This study focused on undergraduate social work ethics curriculum.

Social work is one of the fastest growing professions in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). In the wake of rapidly growing undergraduate social work programs in the United States and the demands for faculty to teach ethical decision-making, the teaching of ethics has become a vital concern to the social work profession (Barbera et al., 2017). Ethics education in undergraduate social work programs has not received the same scholarly attention as graduate social work programs. A qualitative methodology was used in the current study to address this gap in the literature through a content analysis of ethics education in Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States.

The 2017 revisions in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2017) Code of Ethics offered guidelines for social work students and practitioners alike. Although the CSWE and the NASW share a mutual interest, the CSWE grants colleges and universities the prerogative to choose how ethics education is taught in their curriculum (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). The current study may provide a better

understanding of approaches currently in use to teach ethics at CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States.

Overall, the efforts to enhance ethics curriculum requirements in undergraduate social work programs are evident by changes made to the CSWE (2015) Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) and recent changes in the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics. Prior research addressing ethics in social work CSWE-accredited graduate programs confirmed the use of infused and other approaches to teaching ethics education (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). However, there was a gap in the literature on approaches to teaching ethics education currently in use in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs.

The following sections include the background and concepts for the study. Subsequent sections present the problem statement, the limited research in CSWE-accredited undergraduate programs for ethics-infused curricula, and current challenges. The purpose of the study is described along with the research questions. The theoretical framework addresses two applicable theories, and the nature of the study conveys the methodology used to answer the research questions. In subsequent sections, definitions are identified for this study, and assumptions regarding data gathering are presented. The scope and delimitations section indicates the boundaries of the study, and the significance conveys the importance of the study to the social work profession.

Background

CSWE is the accrediting body that approves social work programs offered by higher education institutions to ensure they meet the 2015 EPAS (Sayre & Sar, 2015).

Additionally, the CSWE allows colleges and universities to choose whether to infuse ethics curriculum requirements in undergraduate social work programs or offer a stand-alone ethics course. The CSWE's 2015 EPAS represents the policy for viewing educational curriculum. Some scholars associated curriculum theory with evaluating current educational curriculum, policy decisions, and theorizing about future curricula. For example, Lundgren (2015) offered an analysis of Young's (2013) paper and presented historical perspectives on curriculum theory including the need for a cultural shift; Lundgren further noted impacts of economics and their implications in higher education.

Ethics education requirements are vital in undergraduate social work programs and have a place in social work education pedagogical discussions. Sayre and Sar (2015) reviewed the NASW (2008) core values of social justice and discussed the challenges of pedagogical modernization for underprepared undergraduate social work students entering today's programs. Sayre and Sar maintained that students are negatively impacted by social injustices from within the colleges and universities they attend due to the lack of ongoing support needed for writing skills and mentoring. Other scholars agreed on the growing ethical concerns regarding undergraduate students' abilities to adhere to acceptable documentation practices in the field and suggested the need for faculty to increase their knowledge in this area (McDonald et al., 2015).

The social work profession is a multifaceted, complex, and integral field tasked with ensuring vulnerable populations' safety. Krasen and DeLong-Hamilton (2015) expressed collective concerns about social work students' ethical obligations in child

welfare and comfort levels of reporting child abuse, highlighting that enhancements in social work programs are needed to prepare students for working in this service sector. Sanders and Hoffman (2010) examined approaches including an infused versus mixed-model approach to teach ethics in graduate social work programs. These scholars discussed the variations of ethics social work curriculum at universities located in the Midwest and South areas of the United States and noted implications for the profession. One implication included further research on how ethics content is infused in social work programs. At the time of the current study, limited research existed on content analysis of ethics education requirements in undergraduate social work programs in the United States.

Problem Statement

Although there are approaches to integrate or infuse ethics curriculum in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs, these approaches have not been well studied. The scarcity of information related to teaching ethics education in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs has created a gap in the existing knowledge base of these approaches. The education, awareness, and knowledge of the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics is a mandated CSWE (2015) requirement for practice as a professional social worker in the United States. Kaplan (2006) suggested that there are two approaches to teaching ethics in CSWE-accredited graduate programs: (a) integration throughout the curriculum and (b) a discrete course, also described as a stand-alone or an elective course that focuses solely on ethics. Kaplan's study involved private religious, public, and private nonreligious colleges and universities. In contrast, Sanders and

Hoffman (2010) suggested ethics instruction has been offered to graduate social work students using one of three approaches: (a) discrete with common morality content, (b) infused, and (c) discrete with mixed content with concerns regarding specifics. The schools in Sanders and Hoffman's study were located in Midwest and upper South states and represented public universities and religious schools. These studies suggested there are concerns regarding the approaches, infused or distinct, that these institutions implement to ensure that ethics are presented to the students.

Krasen and DeLong-Hamilton (2015) discussed the ramifications of ethics courses in social work programs and their impacts on accreditation or reaffirmation efforts. Krasen and DeLong-Hamilton further noted vagueness in social work programs' role in preparing undergraduate and graduate social work students for ethical practice in child protective services. Sanders and Hoffman (2010) affirmed that revisions by the CSWE were necessary for undergraduate and graduate social work students to recognize ethical decision-making, to ensure advancements beyond mere knowledge-gaining practice, and to engage marginalized students in ethical practice. Although scholars have not focused on infused or discrete ethics courses, two studies addressed social work ethics with reflective writing for potential practice situations. For example, Sayre and Sar (2015) discussed social work ethics for marginalized undergraduate social work students, especially related to writing and mentoring needs for professional practice. McDonald et al. (2015) recommended ethics curriculum enhancement to ensure ethical practice and to avoid harm to clientele.

However, research has shown more than one way to teach, incorporate, and integrate ethics education in CSWE-accredited graduate social work programs in the United States (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). Despite the proliferation of ethical concerns discussed by scholars (Krasen & DeLong-Hamilton, 2015; McDonald et al., 2015; Sayre & Sar, 2015), the research on the different approaches to teach ethics education in CSWE-accredited undergraduate programs was sparse. The lack of information related to multiple ways of teaching ethics education in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs created a gap in the existing knowledge base of these approaches. Further research on ethics education at the generalist level prompted the need for the current study.

When examining the literature, I found evidence of problems associated with ethics education in undergraduate social work programs and different ways to present ethics to students. CSWE (2015) and the NASW (2017) revised policy and standards to guide ethical decision-making for students and practitioners. Although CSWE made efforts in 2008 and 2015 to require ethics content, no research had been conducted on ethics curriculum in undergraduate social work programs in CSWE-accredited 4-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. Further research was needed to address the gap in approaches to understand how ethics content is infused in undergraduate social work programs. An analysis of ethics curriculum requirements in undergraduate social work programs may be used to develop recommendations to CSWE regarding ethics education for accreditation and reaffirmation. These recommendations

may assist with the development of implicit or explicit outcomes related to ethics education.

The current study contributed to an evolving field of study regarding ethics education in undergraduate social work programs. Findings may provide undergraduate social work full-time and adjunct faculty with a better understanding of how the curriculum provides structural and intentional support to students engaged in coursework and fieldwork. The implications for social change include enhanced social work practice for undergraduate social work students in higher education to ensure consistency of professional development in fieldwork and internship settings. This knowledge may be used to safeguard standardization across institutions of higher learning through professional development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine ethics education requirements in the syllabi from practice courses at CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. The problem was that there was little understanding of how CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs are including ethics content in their curriculum. Several examples in the literature indicated more than one way to teach ethics education in graduate programs: (a) infusion of ethics, (b) a required discrete course/mixed-method approach, and (c) a required discrete course with a focus on a common morality model (Fossen et al., 2014; Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). Sanders and Hoffman (2010) used the term *discrete* to describe the

separateness of a stand-alone or elective ethics course that teaches “ethical behavior in social work” (p. 13).

The current study addressed the concept of social work ethics education requirements integrated or infused in practice courses taught in the CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. A qualitative methodology was used to address the gap in the literature through content analysis of ethics education requirements in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. Course syllabi were used to examine the inclusion of ethics education curriculum requirements within CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast United States. Based on material presented on the current CSWE, the Southeast region comprises 12 states and has 149 undergraduate social work programs. The following research questions (RQs) guided the study:

RQ1: How are the CSWE Competency 1 and the five practice behaviors represented in the CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the Southeast region of the United States?

RQ2: How is the ethics content infused in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the Southeast region of the United States?

Theoretical Framework

One theoretical lens used in this study was common morality theory. Gert (1998) conceptualized common morality theory and asserted that this theory is based on a simple description of a moral system within societies that relies on the rational assumption that

all people are imperfect and are susceptible to negative behaviors. Gert further noted that this theory is applied to rational individuals and can reduce harm to others through an informal public system. The common morality theory by Gert includes five concepts: (a) death, (b) pain, (c) disability, (d) loss of freedom, and (e) loss of pleasure. Common morality theory related to the research method used to determine how content analysis is conducted, specifically focusing on CSWE's Competency 1, which includes five practice behaviors, all of which are described in Chapter 2.

Curriculum theory was also used in the study. According to Lundgren (2015), this theory is based on "(a) the goals, (b) what counts as knowledge, and (c) selection and organization of knowledge within the constructs of a historical lens" (p. 788). Research conducted using curriculum theory may provide insight into how ethics are taught per CSWE's (2015) mandates for knowledge and categorization of content at U.S. institutions.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study was designed to examine undergraduate ethical education requirements and the content of syllabi of practice courses at CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States. Specifically, a content analysis of the syllabi was conducted. During the past 20 years, there has been an increase in concerns regarding potential unethical conduct within the social work profession. Concerns with ethical standards applied to technology use in practice were cited by Reamer (1999), and Karpman and Drisko (2016) underscored the need for social work education to develop social media policy to address unethical behavior for student

preparedness. Reamer (1999) asserted that undergraduate social work programs could benefit from incorporating ethics in their curricula to assist students in linking ethics to practice. These ethical concerns are still relevant, according to Reamer (2018), due to new NASW guidelines in 2017 amid ethical concerns with the social workers' use of technology.

There is also a need for additional qualitative research in social work, as indicated by Padgett (2017). Rudestam and Newton (2015) discussed qualitative methods that reflected various sources of data including but not limited to documents. In the current study, a content analysis was conducted using the syllabi of practice courses from undergraduate social work CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States. The rationale for the qualitative approach was the need to analyze undergraduate social work practice course syllabi to determine how content is taught as mandated by the CSWE (2015). This study addressed ethics content integrated or infused in the practice level courses in the Southeast region. The key concepts investigated were infused or integrated ethics content at educational institutions in the Southeast United States.

Definitions

Specific terms fundamental to the study are defined as follows:

Common morality-discrete: An approach to graduate ethics required by a U.S. institution whereby students are familiarized to the common morality context (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Common morality theory: A theory that was pioneered by Gert (1998) and defined as a moral system within civilizations that depends on the rational assumption that all individuals are imperfect and are susceptible (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE): The national accreditation agency that represents social work education in the United States (Sayre & Sar, 2015).

Curriculum theory: Goals and thoughts that represent knowledge, as well as the selection and organization of knowledge within a historical framework (Lundgren, 2015).

Discrete approach: The stand-alone or elective ethics course that teaches ethical behavior in social work (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Infused: Permeated ethics content throughout a social work program's curriculum as reflected in course objectives that adhere to the education in and the application of the NASW Code of Ethics (Black et al., 2002).

Mixed model-discrete: Infused content on ethics or an ethics course is an elective focused on ethics and ethical behavior in social work (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

National Association of Social Workers (NASW): The organization that provides the code of ethics guidelines for the day-to-day professional conduct of social workers to address complexities in practice in a secured manner (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010).

Private university: A college or university that operates as an educational nonprofit organization (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013).

Public university: A college or university primarily funded by a state government (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013).

Assumptions

An assumption in this study was that all accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States adhere to the standards regarding ethics curriculum in their CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. This assumption is essential to an institution's program accreditation or reaffirmation. Another assumption was that undergraduate social work programs had taken critical steps to prepare their students for the complexities within the social work profession. Krasen and DeLong-Hamilton (2015) disputed this assumption that students were ready to assume ethical responsibilities at multifaceted child welfare agencies due to the social work program's role ambiguity in aiding students for such settings. Nevertheless, it was necessary to assume that the infusion of ethics curriculum would be accompanied by a real-world application using CSWE's (2015) mandated EPAS. Another assumption was that CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States would have their catalogs posted on their website to show ethics education requirements in syllabi for practice courses. I assumed that most of the syllabi could be accessed from the websites of CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was focused on CSWE-accredited undergraduate programs in the Southeast region of the United States. This study did not include non-CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region. Distinct ethics courses were also excluded from the study. Also excluded from this study were CSWE-accredited graduate social work programs.

Prior studies indicated more than one approach to teaching ethics education in CSWE-accredited graduate school programs (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). However, little research existed on how these approaches are applied to CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. The CSWE (2015) mandates and recent changes in the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics were the reasons this research topic was chosen. The boundaries included CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses. Several other courses apply to ethics. For example, such courses could include criminal justice, gerontology, human behavior, spirituality or religion, maternal and child health, social welfare policy, and research (Camp et al., 2018; Fogel & Ellison, 2005; Mackey & Levan, 2019; Megregian et al., 2020; Townsend, 2020). Findings from this study are not generalizable to other regions outside the Southeast region of the United States but may provide transferable information as schools evaluate ethics content.

Limitations

This study's limitations related to the qualitative methodology included the inability to generalize findings to other U.S. regions of CSWE-accredited colleges and universities. Qualitative research is a limited form of inquiry in which findings cannot be applied to other places beyond the site under study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Consequently, this study's findings were limited to the 19 CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States. Another limitation of this study was that syllabi's course content might be limited by subject (see Landrum & Ohsowski, 2017) and by institutions. This limitation may be mitigated by the fact that accreditation

standards are uniform across all Bachelor's in Social Work (BSW) programs in the United States.

The human factor can be a positive and negative element of a qualitative study. Qualitative researchers must demonstrate self-reflection to avoid research bias (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Because I was part of the qualitative process, mitigation of researcher bias was factored into this study. I am a full-time undergraduate social work instructor at one of the 19 CSWE-accredited universities in the Southeast region of the United States. As a strategy to address course syllabi and research biases, I consulted with colleagues and discussed thoughts that could negatively impact data collection and analysis. I was the sole data collector for this study. In content analysis, one of the concerns is that all codes are reliable (Prasad, 2019). One way to address this was to have another person look at a subset of data to ensure reliability. Consequently, a second person served as an interrater coder for two to three syllabi codings. I employed this strategy to mitigate the potential concerns associated with researcher coding.

Significance

This research contributed to an evolving field of study regarding ethics as integrated or infused content in undergraduate social work programs. Findings may be used to ensure that students have acquired the knowledge and skills, primary ethical behaviors, and social work ethics to safeguard effective social work practice. This knowledge and skill may impact students as they become professional social workers who will be held accountable for specific ethical criteria.

Results may also advance scientific knowledge in the social work profession and dialogue with stakeholders identified in the study. For example, the outcomes may assist social work faculty with alternative approaches to teaching entry-level students through curriculum enhancement. Moreover, findings may provide evidence to law enforcement, state and federal agencies, and community-care providers who seek to expand the social work labor force, education, and research in the United States. Positive social change may result from recommendations for ethics curriculum to strengthen underprepared undergraduate social work students and reduce unethical practice by underserved student populations.

Summary

The efforts to enhance ethics curriculum requirements for the social work profession are evidenced by the CSWE's decision in 2008 to revise the EPAS (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). The CSWE's (2015) mandate and the NASW's Code of Ethics revisions for 2017 made this study relevant for undergraduate social work education. Common morality theory and curriculum theory were used to understand approaches to teaching ethics in undergraduate programs. Scholars noted that more research is needed to address ethics education in social work programs to better prepare students for the profession (Krasen & DeLong-Hamilton, 2015; McDonald et al., 2015; Sayre & Sar, 2015). Although the CSWE (2015) allowed ethics education to be infused in the curriculum, studies have focused on graduate social work programs. Additional research in the area of ethics in social work education is essential to the profession and practice of social work. The current study addressed the gap in the literature regarding how social work ethics is

taught to students in undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to this study, including the research questions, problem statement, and theories used.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of understanding of how CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs are including ethics content in their curriculum. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine ethics education requirements in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. The objectives of the literature review were to (a) examine historical CSWE policy efforts related to a social work practice course and curriculum enhancement, (b) review CSWE and NASW's previous and current collaborative efforts with social work ethics curriculum and practice, (c) position the study within the literature that focused on social work ethics curriculum and how the knowledge base on practice courses has evolved in CSWE-accredited undergraduate programs, and (d) examine ethics curricula in three other social science disciplines related to social work. Sanders and Hoffman's (2010) study neither validated nor invalidated an infused model for teaching ethics in social work education, but these ethics scholars added

> However, if the profession continues to accept that an infused model is adequate for teaching ethical decision-making, far more research is required to answer a number of questions. First, what is the content of an effective infused model? Second, how is the content infused? Third, how does a program ensure that instructors are adequately prepared to support an infused model? (pp. 19-20)

Literature Search Strategy

To locate relevant literature, I searched the following databases: Thoreau Multi-Database Search, SocINDEX, MEDLINE, ERIC, Education Source, and Academic

Search Complete. I also consulted credible websites for information, including those related to the Florida Social Work Consortium, CSWE, NASW, Department of Homeland Security, Human Services, American Psychological Association, American Nurses Association, American Counseling Association, Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, and the National Board for Certified Counselors. The search terms included *curriculum development*, *values*, *ethics*, *social work education*, *social work values*, *social work ethics*, *ethics education*, *social work*, *comparing outcomes graduate*, *ethical professional writings*, *writing values*, *principles*, *psychology ethics*, *nursing ethics*, and *ethics counseling education*.

The Thoreau Multi-Database Search database yielded 30 results for the search terms *curriculum*, *values*, and *ethics*. Using the search terms *curriculum*, *theory*, and *crisis* resulted in 66 additional journal articles. Applying the terms *professional*, *ethical writings,* and *principles* elicited three different articles. Combining the search terms *ethics education* and *social work education* and *graduate students* produced one more result. The full-text and non-full-text searches resulted in 138 articles for the search terms *social work education*, *social work values*, and *social work ethics*.

Theoretical Foundation

Two theories, common morality theory (Gert, 1998) and curriculum theory (Lundgren, 2015), provided the theoretical foundation for this study. Gert's (1998) common morality theory stems from moral philosophy rooted in the study of the moral obligation of actions and after actions, which rightly or wrongly is constructed through a series of rules. Gert posited that common morality theory is based on a moral system.

When a moral rule is broken, regardless of the reason, it must adhere to upholding another rule that prevents further harm (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). Sanders and Hoffman (2010) used common morality theory as a framework for research about ethics education and outcomes with graduate social work students. I applied the same theoretical foundation in the current study. Regarding ethics education in practice courses and the use of the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics, I applied common morality theory to teaching ethics education in undergraduate social work programs.

Curriculum theory was discussed by Linné (2015), who credited Lundgren as the pioneer of the theory and highlighted the challenges of moving from a frame factor standpoint in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. A frame factor situates curriculum content from a certain period to teach concepts applicable to that era. However, some scholars have agreed on the need for relevant curriculum inquires. Westbury (2007) argued that curriculum scholars should shift from a text-theorizing approach to a real-world one. Text theorizing offers limited understanding of the manifestation of larger social issues and complexities in the social work professions. Highlighted proceedings from a conference, according to Englund et al. (2012), emphasized the importance of a curriculum related to knowledge. Although Linné did not mention direct curriculum theory applications to social work education, this theory was suitable for content analysis of ethics curriculum requirements in undergraduate social work programs. Curriculum theory was appropriate for this study due to its educational framework where knowledge is underway (see Linné, 2015). Groessl (2015) reminded designers of social work courses of the importance of values and ethics and further

warned that designers should not take strategies to teach such classes lightly. The two research questions in the current study related to the challenge in describing how CSWE (2015) Competency 1 and the five practice behaviors are infused in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the Southeast region of the United States.

Council on Social Work Education's Curriculum History

An introductory overview of the history of CSWE's commitment to content analysis of social work curriculum for students' preparedness is relevant for understanding where the body of literature related to this study's topic originated. The value placed on CSWE's evolving commitment to the social work curriculum, specifically in a foundation or practice course, is not a new concept. Hines (2004) asserted that social work curriculum infusion or integration began over 70 years ago. In 1942, all U.S. schools of social work were expected to integrate a method of social work practice course into their social work curriculum. In 1952, the CSWE first announced its statement for curriculum policy, including expectations that all social work students must ascertain social workgroup knowledge, known then and now as a foundations course (Hines, 2004). Murphy (1959) also confirmed the need to enhance curriculum development to measure mutual concepts, central elements, and overall educational objectives. The 1950s and 1960s brought about a shift in the growing interest in the profession's ethics and practitioners (Callahan & Bok, 1980). Sweifach (2014) acknowledged U.S. social work educationalist Pumphrey, who in 1961 reported an urgent need for clinical social work practitioners to demonstrate applications of values and

ethics in service delivery and make it observable to novice clinical social work students in preparation for individual, group, and community practice. During this period, the literature on values and ethical issues, as argued by Pumphrey (1961), directly referenced graduate-level students but not undergraduate students. Pumphrey is historically significant to the knowledge base on how values and ethics education curriculum evolved 8 years later. Zeiger (2002) reported that in 1969 the NASW recognized the BSW as an entry-level practice. NASW's historic decisions are relevant to the current study and today's entry-level social work students. As evidenced by landmark decisions in recognition of the baccalaureate community, the collaboration between the accreditation agency and the national organization is discussed in the next section.

Casework (micro practice), group work (mezzo practice), and community organizing (macro practice) were merged into a single practice framework by CSWE in 1969 through its new curriculum policy formulation (Simon & Kilbane, 2014; Sweifach, 2014). Sweifach (2014) also reported that the 1970s was a transitional period that moved from the previously mentioned framework to the newly identified *generalist* curriculum. As the 1970s evolved, the social work profession and other disciplines, including but not limited to medicine, law, business, journalism, engineering, nursing, and criminal justice, began to examine the complexities of ethical issues more stringently. Some researchers signaled a renewed focus on values and ethics in the social work profession during the early 1980s (Reamer, 2001; Reamer & Abramson, 1982). These researchers argued that faculty members must teach ethical practice in classroom settings and field practicums to prepare social work students for the contemporary challenge in field practice. Values and

ethics have existed as an integral component of social work practice. For the most part, the purpose is to maintain human dignity and respect as practitioners strive to practice with values, ethics, and principles necessary in the profession. These professional requirements affirm that requirements and ethical concerns are paramount in the human services sector (Griffiths et al., 2018).

The historical perspective was relevant to the current study because it illustrated efforts that schools of social work made in the development of CSWE's standards for curriculum policy (Hines, 2004). These efforts helped to ascertain social work knowledge that contributed to transforming foundation course content. CSWE used content analysis to determine the presence of individual concepts within the texts that resulted in curriculum development. Content analysis is a research method used to determine the presence of specific words, patterns, or concepts within qualitative data (Krippendorff, 2013). The historical background of social work curriculum enhancement and ethics education in the context of professional responsibility is discussed in the next section.

Approaches to Teaching Ethics in Social Work

The education, awareness, and knowledge of the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics is a mandated CSWE (2015) requirement to graduate and practice as a professional social worker in the United States. Researchers have offered multiple ways to teach ethics in graduate social work programs (Kaplan, 2006; Sanders & Hoffman, 2010), but the literature was sparse on approaches related to teaching ethics in undergraduate social work programs. The lack of information about infused or discrete methods in the

baccalaureate community created a gap in the existing knowledge base for these approaches in CSWE-accredited undergraduate programs.

Research conducted on teaching social work ethics must include a discussion on the position of generalist social work education related to how ethics content is integrated or infused and presented to students. Sanders and Hoffman (2010) emphasized the importance of ethics and values in the social work profession by asking "given the profession's proclivity for evidence-based practice, would it not make sense to continue evaluative research that helps us determine evidence-based best practices for teaching important contents areas?" (p. 20). A review of the literature on approaches to curriculum requirements for ethics education in undergraduate social work programs indicated that marginal attention had been paid. Sayre and Sar (2015) noted that CSWE is the national accreditation agency for social work programs and is responsible for ensuring that curriculum's ethics component is met. Sayre and Sar further suggested different ways to achieve this expectation; these approaches included integration or infusion of ethics curriculum at CSWE-accredited institutions.

Moreover, Sayre and Sar (2015) directed their efforts toward studying correlations between infused or distinct approaches to ensure that ethics are presented to graduate social work students at two public state universities and one private religious school. It has been over a decade since CSWE (2008) revised its core competencies to the recently mandated 2015 EPAS (Sayre & Sar, 2015). For the current study, I examined ethics curricula from private and public CSWE undergraduate institutions in the Southeast region of the United States using the CSWE (2015) mandates. I also examined

how ethics is infused for practice courses in undergraduate social work programs. Social work faculty are responsible for ensuring that ethics content is taught in micro, macro, management, and ethics courses and field seminar to safeguard professional conduct (Boland-Prom et al., 2018). Teaching ethics education goes beyond the classroom to safeguarding professional behavior in practice to avoid legal implications. Reamer (1999) stated "social workers must be concerned about the ramifications of their ethical decisions and actions, particularly the possibility of professional malpractice and misconduct" (p. 4). Twenty years later, additional information in the literature reviewed substantiated the need for social workers to enhance their understanding of ethical standards in social work practice.

Some researchers have contended that in the wake of rising lawsuits in the United States (Barker & Branson, 2000; Houston-Vega et al., 1997; Reamer, 2015), efforts have been made to broaden ethical standards. According to Reamer (2018), this was due to advancing technology and the need to devise feasible risk-management approaches to protect vulnerable populations. Reamer (2018) noted first-time collaborative efforts between stakeholders within social work organizations in the United States, specifically NASW, CSWE, the Association of Social Work Boards, and the Clinical Social Work Association. Reamer (2018) added that these regulatory bodies united to develop new guidelines in 2017 amid ethical concerns with the social workers' use of technology. As postulated by Reamer (2018), these four governing organizations have a responsibility to jointly address the current social worker's use of technology and ethical concerns. These efforts appear to be related to Sanders and Hoffman's (2010) concerns raised 8 years

prior. Sanders and Hoffman challenged the social work profession to conduct more research in education and ethical decision-making. Two of the first three questions asked by Sanders and Hoffman, as stated in the beginning of this chapter, are similar to the two research questions in the current study. However, the boundaries of the current study were the Southeast region of the United States.

Measurement of Moral Reasoning and Teaching Approach

Although I perceived a gap in the knowledge base on approaches to presenting ethics education at the generalist level, prior studies showed promising outcomes using the Defining Issues Test (DIT) (Rest et al., 1999). Kaplan (2006) conducted a quantitative study using the DIT measure with 265 master-level social workers (MSW) between 1999 and 2001. Kaplan compared MSW social workers who graduated with undergraduate degrees in social work and undergraduate degrees in liberal arts, with specific ethics courses in their undergraduate education, and those who did not have ethics courses in undergraduate education. Kaplan found ethics courses to be marginally associated with levels of moral reasoning. Although Kaplan found the infusion method of ethics education was more effective than discrete courses, Kaplan argued that a student's moral reasoning would be enhanced by both infused and discrete ethics courses.

Sanders and Hoffman (2010) conducted a study of 144 graduate students in the Midwest and South areas of the United States that consisted of three CSWE-accredited schools of social work. Sanders and Hoffman found that the curriculum differed in the way these institutions taught ethics or conveyed content (discrete, infused, or mixed model, as measured by the DIT2 for moral decision-making [Rest et al., 1999]), but

asserted that they could neither validate nor invalidate an infused model for ethics education. Kaplan (2006) and Sanders and Hoffman agreed that more research on ethics education and curriculum expansion in CSWE-accredited graduate programs was warranted. Dolgoff et al. (2012) pointed out that unethical conduct at multiple levels in society has become commonplace. Dolgoff et al. added that courses in ethics are on the rise, including but not limited to institutions of higher education.

Models of Decision-Making and Teaching Approaches

Researchers provided evidence on ethical decision-making with undergraduate social work students enrolled in a capstone course that included former CSWE standards. Fossen et al. (2014) researched an ethical decision-making model known as the examine, think, hypothesize, identify, consult, select, and advocate (ETHICA) model (Congress, 1999, 2000). Through the original mandates of the CSWE 2001 EPAS, Fossen et al. analyzed social work program data from field instructor assessments, alumni self-assessments, and feedback from employer surveys that showed program objectives were achieved. Fossen et al. further asserted that social work program faculty decided to integrate ethics content into social work practice courses instead of offering a stand-alone ethics course. According to Fossen et al., curriculum immersion occurred due to new insights gained by students' recognition of ethical decision-making, per the NASW (2008) guidelines. Fossen et al. added that these former undergraduate social work students were enrolled in suitable courses whereby content and progression of infused ethics education occurred. On the other hand, Edwards and Addae (2015) offered a strategy to teach an undergraduate social work elective course as a model for ethical

decision-making. Using the former NASW (2008) standards, Edwards and Addae described course content that focused on rural social work practice.

This research study could benefit from the frameworks described above to examine ethics contents using the new CSWE (2015) mandates and revised NASW (2017) standards. It is not widely known how these approaches apply to methods of social work practice courses and could potentially be useful in undergraduate social work education. The CSWE (2015) EPAS, competency 1, states that "social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standard, as well as relevant laws and regulations that may impact practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels" (p. 7). Therefore, an examination of various approaches to teach ethics in undergraduate social work programs was examined. However, due to limited research knowledge in ethics education in undergraduate social work programs, I expanded the literature review to include three other social science disciplines: psychology, counseling education, and nursing.

Comparative Disciplines and Ethics Curricula

Psychology

During the 1980s, the evolution of ethics education in undergraduate psychology programs began to surface relevant to legal practice and a stand-alone philosophy course in logic and ethics (Swenson, 1983). A social psychology course was incorporated into the curriculum due to the rise of social issues (Swenson, 1988). Over the years, the debate continued in the discipline to include a need to shift from presenting ethics solely during internships to the classroom setting (Haemmerlie & Matthews, 1988). In contrast, Barber

and Bagsby (2012) postulated that content should include ethics on research and participants in undergraduate psychology programs and offered online teaching resources to support faculty, although more is needed. You et al. (2018) argued that students should be presented with ethics in an introduction to psychology course, followed by a research methods course.

Barber et al. (2015) believed that the undergraduate psychology curriculum had not received the attention needed to address acceptable participant behavior guidelines. Using the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2007) guidelines, Barber et al. (2015) utilized a quantitative method to survey 44 undergraduate psychology students to test an online learning module's efficacy. Their study's three dimensions included students' ethical perceptions, knowledge, and behavior to test an online learning module's effectiveness. The results of their study showed promise for increasing ethical knowledge and behavior but not in students' perceptions. While Barber et al. (2015) found these results occurred, other scholars reported results through a review of course syllabi, which is consistent with this research study.

Building on undergraduate studies' momentum, recent literature has brought attention to ethics education in psychology graduate programs. However, the structure of the content varies and focused mostly on course objectives and institutional policies. Through content analysis of syllabi, Griffith et al. (2014) found that content consisted of three broad categories: (a) general information (course objectives and school policies), (b) assignments, (c) journal articles, and (d) books. Likewise, You et al.'s (2018) study found the same content but also noted (a) requirement, (b) schedule, and (c) grading.

Both of these studies employed quantitative methodologies to determine ethics curricula content.

Counselor Education

In 1981, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) was established (www.cacrep, 2020). The American Counseling Association (ACA) provides ethical decision-making guidelines for counselors and counselors in training (ACA, 2014). Leading panel experts have recognized the importance of ethics education within the counseling industry. Herlihy and Dufrene (2011) surveyed 18 expert panelists using the Delphi technique to gain greater insight into how leaders respond to ethical issues. The results revealed more than half (61%) of the participants agreed that ensuring ethical practice by counselors and adhering to the code was most important. The results also showed consensus by all 18 that teaching ethical decisions to be the most critical issue in counselor preparation. Seventy-eight percent of participants agreed on modeling appropriate relationships in counselor education programs.

The complexity of adherence to professional codes is a layered process. For example, Kolb (1984) offered a model for ethical decision-making. According to ACA (2014), “No specific ethical decision-making model is always most effective, so counselors are expected to use a credible model of decision making that can bear public scrutiny of its application” (p. 3). However, to further understand how a model was used to infuse ethics-related content in a counselor education program, Sanabria and Murray (2018) suggested an assignment that infused human sexuality content to help counselor

educators strengthen their student's professional development for ethical services to a diverse clientele. Kimball and Daniel (2020) promoted a reflective writing assignment to enhance cognitive complexities via ethics education.

Modeling appropriate behavior, as discussed above, has surfaced in recent literature. Burns (2019) surveyed counseling education graduate students who rated 16 boundary-crossing scenarios involving counselor educators. A total of 224 students completed the pretest and posttest for this study. The results indicated that students found it unacceptable for a counselor educator to engage in 9 of the 16 scenarios. With the exception of the placebo, the scenarios were aligned with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), boundary-crossing decision-making model (Gottlieb, 1993), and social dual-role relationship model (Burian & Slimp, 2000). The results indicated the students' awareness of boundary-crossing as unethical and power differentials between themselves and the counselor educator.

In contrast, Rapp et al. (2018) discussed concerns with counselor education programs' lack of support to doctoral students and offered curriculum recommendations for ethics-related to gatekeeping, among others. In addition to the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), and the 2016 CACREP Standards (2015), and the National Board for Certified Counselors Code of Ethics (2012), the authors suggested infusing these mandates in curriculum and training with doctoral students. The authors further asserted that these codes and standards be included during orientation and advising sessions and as discrete courses. According to ACA (2014), "Gatekeeping – the initial and ongoing academic,

skill, and dispositional assessment of students' competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" (p. 20).

Nursing

During the late 1980s, Thompson and Thompson (1989) discussed concerns relevant to ethics education in nursing approaches, content, and methodology. Consensus on standardizations for ethics education in nursing programs is still evolving. To gain a broader view of what scholars have done to promote ethics education in nursing, it is essential to identify past efforts. Burkemper et al. (2007) surveyed Master of Science in Nursing programs accredited by either the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Burkemper et al. (2007) found that most programs did not require instructors to complete formal ethics training and noted a lack of competency standards. Moreover, the authors noted inconsistencies in the approach in which ethics was taught and content. Earlier research that involved nurses and social workers in hospital and non-hospital settings found 26% of respondents did not receive ethics education (Ulrich et al., 2007). Grady et al. (2008) responded to commentators that affirmed the need for more research on approaches, content, and timing of ethics education for nurses, social workers, and other health professionals. While Grady et al. (2008) acknowledged the importance of such debates, they also confirmed the need for further discussion to establish ethics education goals due to nurses and social workers' lack of confidence and moral actions. Another author argued that decision-making models are vital to ethics education to help aid student nurses who were not presented with ethics education (Garity, 2009).

As previously mentioned, the DIT was used to assess the moral decision-making of graduate social work students (Sanders & Hoffman, 2010). McLeod-Sordjan (2014) evaluated techniques to examine one measurable outcome of moral reasoning in ethics curricula. Using data from reflective journaling, Ethics of Care Interview (Gilligan, 1982), and DIT (Rest et al., 1999), the results suggest benefits for nurse educators to develop a purposive assessment to increase the likelihood of pre-moral to pre-caring stages of nursing students. To further understand the process of pre-thinking of ethics-related activities, Krautscheid and Brown (2014) conducted a qualitative research study to understand the lived experiences of senior-level baccalaureate nursing students confronted with a clinical scenario that required micro ethical decision making. The authors reported a disconnect between the curriculum, including an undergraduate ethics course, discussions on ethics, and students' ability to recall and apply ethics in a simulated practice experience. According to Worthley (1997), micro ethics are day-to-day ethical decisions faced by nurses. The 2015 revisions in the American Nurses' Association (ANA) Code of Ethics offer guidelines for nursing students, nursing faculty, and practitioners (ANA, 2015). Some postulate that nurses, including psychiatric nurses, are not well-trained to identify ethical dilemmas upon graduating from nursing programs (Chao et al., 2017; Park, 2012). Recent research offers modern-day approaches to ethics education in nursing programs. As such, scholars designed a two-part e-learning system that was integrated into the curriculum for a stand-alone nursing ethics course (part one), which also involved evaluating its effectiveness (part-two) in their quasi-experimental study (Chao et al., 2017).

Demonstrated ethical competence could contribute to increasing the likelihood of ethical decision-making. Pachkowski (2017) conducted a study and noted an essential factor in ethics competence: awareness of evolving complexities in healthcare settings and the ability to assess them accordingly. The author also suggested a familiarity with ethics theory to provide a framework for ethical decision-making. Finally, the author offered five characteristics for an ethically competent nurse: (a) recognizes the complex medical, social, legal, and interpersonal factors which influence the patient's presenting state; (b) recognizes the effect of the patient's mental health state; (c) recognizes her or his own values and can assess and manage the influence of these; (d) has sufficient familiarity with a variety of ethical theories to provide a framework of assessment or to apply decision-making models meaningfully; and (e) can act to resolve issues within her or his scope of practice. The author further noted action could include the following: identify moral issues as moral issues; distinguish moral issues from legal issues; assess the situation to refer onward, consult or make a moral deliberation; and assess the impact and consequences of the dilemma/action on the patient, family, and self.

In contrast, Krautscheid (2017) conducted a qualitative study that assessed curriculum in a bachelor of nursing program that infused micro ethical dilemmas in high-fidelity simulation scenarios. The authors found that the participants failed to apply ethics education previously learned in coursework. Grason (2020) conducted a qualitative study of nursing faculty perceptions in undergraduate programs to understand their experiences, teaching ethics, and ethics-related educational background. Eleven faculty participated in the study. The research finding showed that faculty, along with the students they taught,

lacked preparation, challenging content, and had an overburdened curriculum. These results confirm previous ethics education in nursing programs studies discussed above.

Summary of Comparative Disciplines

The evolving literature within three social science disciplines: psychology, counseling, and nursing, and confirm professional accreditation standards to guide ethical decision making for both students and practitioners alike. All disciplines appear to face similar challenges related to approaches, content, and methods for including ethics education in their accredited programs. More specifically, the timing to introduce ethics education to students and ethics-related assignments, techniques, and assessments relevant to stress reductions in preparation for future practice. The majority of the literature focused on students in master's and doctoral social work programs.

There were also differences within the disciplines. For example, the nursing programs were challenged by nurse educators and their students who lack prior ethics training. The counselor education programs are challenged with gatekeeping of the profession. The psychology programs are balancing the decision of exactly where to focus ethics in course syllabi. Although the challenges vary, all three professions appear to be committed to ethics education amid a changing and complex society.

This information can inform the social work profession in three ways:

1. Continue the focus of ethics education in all levels of practice courses.
2. Establish ethics training for social work faculty, consider internal or external program evaluation of the social work department, and ensure student assessments and outcomes, per CSWE (2015) mandates.

3. Maintain a central focus on modern-day technology to ensure ethical practice in the social work profession.

Summary of Literature Review

Overall, the literature review focused on several aspects of ethics education in social work, a historical analysis of CSWE policy efforts related to content analysis of a social work foundation course for curriculum enhancement, and collaboration between CSWE and NASW to ensure social work ethics curriculum and practice. Research showed different approaches to teaching ethics in graduate social work programs. For example, in general, the infused approach was used in most social science disciplines. However, limited research exists on how these approaches are applied in undergraduate social work.

Findings from previous research studies also suggested that the code of ethics and professional standards are not enough to ensure ethical behaviors. These standards should be augmented with appropriate and timely introductions in curricula, orientations, training, assessments, and evaluations to reduce liabilities of cause harm and increase the likelihood of ethical practice. Meanwhile, more research is needed to address ethics in professional education.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to collect the data necessary for conducting the content analysis. The chapter will provide a review of how I obtained the sample of syllabi and the measurement tool used for coding the syllabi. Furthermore, I discuss strategies to ensure trustworthiness and confidentiality, and ethical issues related to the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine ethics education requirements in practice courses in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. I examined the CSWE (2015) Competency 1 and the five practice behaviors. Competency 1 and the five practice behaviors are taught in undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. The CSWE (2015) and the social work profession may be informed of the different approaches to ethics education in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs.

The phenomenon of interest was ethics content of the curricula in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work course syllabi in the Southeast region of the United States. CSWE (2015) Competency 1 requires students to demonstrate ethical and professional behavior. Additionally, the five CSWE (2015) practice behaviors were reviewed: (a) make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to content; (b) use reflections and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations; (c) demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and oral, written, and electronic communication; (d) use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and (e) use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

This chapter presents the methodology used to identify the information necessary in conducting a content analysis. I review how the sample of syllabi was obtained, and the measurement tool used for coding the syllabi. Furthermore, I review strategies used to ensure trustworthiness and confidentiality and discuss ethical issues that emerged in the study. Course syllabi were used in this qualitative study to examine the inclusion of ethics curriculum requirements within CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How are the CSWE Competency 1 and the five practice behaviors represented in the CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in Southeast region of the United States?

RQ2: How is ethics content infused in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the Southeast region of the United States?

Unlike prior research that included quantitative methods for numerical outputs (Fossen et al., 2014), I applied a qualitative approach. I examined existing documents (course syllabi) to comprehend ethics education in undergraduate social work programs. A qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it allowed me to categorize and code ethics-infused content found in the curricula at 19 CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States.

Role of the Researcher

I currently hold a position as a full-time faculty member in a social work program at a private nonprofit sectarian institution in Florida. Also, I have a previous professional

affiliation with one public university in Florida. Potential researcher biases included prior teaching experience in undergraduate CSWE-accredited social work programs, specifically in methods of social work practice courses in the state of Florida. My world views are shaped through work experience with course design and curriculum enhancements at a private undergraduate CSWE-accredited social work program in the state of Florida. The BSW program I currently teach in did not offer a discrete ethics course at the time of this study; therefore, my experience had only been with infusing ethics content. These views influenced the design for this qualitative study based on the premise that practice courses would only include Methods of Social Work Practice I, II, and III. However, other institutions in the Southeast region of the United States unfamiliar to me may include other practice courses that may yield rich information from a content analysis of course syllabi. To mitigate personal values and reduce bias, I consulted with colleagues to incorporate an objective approach, thereby avoiding preconceived ideas on how an institution should or should not infuse or integrate ethics education at undergraduate CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The syllabi were the unit of analysis. The participating institutions for this study included undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States accredited by CSWE. The Southeast region was chosen because it was near my home state, had not been previously studied, and provided a manageable sampling frame. Using

the Directory of Accredited Programs search tool on the CSWE website, I filtered by state and program level to identify the following BSW programs in the Southeast region of the United States: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. An emailed invitation to participate was sent to all 149 schools within this region that were listed on the CSWE website. The listing of schools is located in Appendix E.

Fifty-one syllabi from schools in 10 states were received. The sample included syllabi from methods of social work practice courses from 19 programs. The inclusion criteria required syllabi from methods of social work practice courses be provided to me as a PDF, Word document, or HML text.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument included an adapted version of the CSWE (2015) Sample Generalist Curriculum Matrix. The CSWE revised the Sample Generalist Curriculum Matrix in 2017. The matrix is published on the CSWE's website. The CSWE recommended this data collection instrument, which is offered to CSWE-accredited colleges or universities to track 2015 core competencies. The adapted instrument helped me conduct a content analysis to answer the two research questions. Specifically, the adapted instrument was used to code the data in the syllabi representing ethics content. I adapted the language from the electronic PDF matrix to align with the two research questions in the study. This instrument is located in Appendix A.

Although language modification was needed, this matrix form had been used with CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the United States and was deemed suitable

to organize data for the current study. Methods of social work practice courses, also referred to as foundation courses, are required for all CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. The method-appropriate strategy for content validity allowed for a critical examination of ethics education in the methods of social work practice courses.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The participating institutions in this study included CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States. I assumed that most of the syllabi could be accessed from the school's website; however, that was not the case. Instead, I had to contact university and college deans, department chairs, and directors, who granted access to the course syllabi to examine ethics education curriculum requirements in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses.

Recruitment involved four steps. First, I obtained the list of schools and contact information from CSWE's website. Second, I called the deans, chairs, and directors at colleges and universities to extend the research invitation. The telephone script is located in Appendix C. Third, I followed up with an email to reiterate the telephone conversation regarding the study, and attached a copy of the IRB consent form. This email message is located in Appendix D. Fourth, I received email responses from deans, directors, and chairs, accompanied by signed IRB consent forms, which I signed and returned before obtaining the requested syllabi for the study.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), this method was conducive to addressing a phenomenon. I was the sole person collecting the undergraduate social work course syllabi for the study. Data collection began on February 19, 2020. The data collection

ended on October 15, 2020 once I obtained the practice course syllabi from deans, department chairs, and directors at colleges and universities. The data for this study were recorded in a CSWE (2015) matrix Word document. Approval to use this document was obtained via email from CSWE on April 4, 2019 (see Appendix B). Neither debriefing nor follow-up procedures applied to this study because data were obtained from methods of social work practice course syllabi at university and college institutions, not human subjects. The data were copied and pasted into a Word document and analyzed to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis Plan

Open coding (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) was used to note sections of content in the methods of social work practice course syllabi from 19 CSWE-accredited undergraduate programs in the Southeast region of the United States. Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that sections of the document could be utilized to identify specific words related to the study. Terms associated with data for this study were CSWE 2015 Competency 1 and practice behaviors. Other terms related to the data included *course content*, *readings*, *module*, *assignment*, *case studies*, *quizzes*, *exams*, *class activity*, and *service-learning*. Seven terms linked to dimensions included *knowledge*, *skills*, *values*, *cognitive and affective processes*, *ethics*, *awareness*, and *ability*. Finally, public and private colleges and universities were linked to institution type.

According to Miles et al. (2014), the initial phase of open coding involves word designation for terms relevant to portions of data. In the current study, the concepts included the following: the CSWE (2015) Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and

Professional Behavior. Also included were CSWE's (2015) five practice behaviors: (a) make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to content; (b) use reflections and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations; (c) demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and oral, written, and electronic communication; (d) use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and (e) use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

The data collected were placed in a matrix to code infused content of ethics education in the syllabi. Appropriate for qualitative studies, Dedoose (2016) software was used to analyze patterns of codes with ethics education content. Dedoose is a web-based, password-protected qualitative software program that allows users to analyze and organize data. I managed discrepant cases by classifying the syllabi's lack of similarity for ethics education content.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The credibility of qualitative studies depends on trustworthiness between the researcher's categories and what is true. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), qualitative researchers should develop a validity strategy that links the design, instrument, and data. First, I used an Excel spreadsheet to identify and label data from the 19 CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States. The existing documents included methods of social work practice course syllabi.

This information was backed up using digital and hard copies to ensure data collection (see Saldana, 2016). These two strategies helped to minimize challenges with streamlining classifications for continuity of data. Another data collection method included the CSWE (2015) matrix for undergraduate programs approved for use on April 4, 2019, by the CSWE. A pattern of observations was repeated to enhance internal validity.

Transferability in qualitative research can be ensured contextually when the findings' generalizability can help understand something being questioned (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). However, the current qualitative study was unique in that it did not represent a large population, but rather 19 CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States. Dedoose was used to analyze the data to strengthen the external validity of the study. The findings are generalizable only to the Southeast region of the United States. Enhanced interrater coding involved a colleague from my university.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) posited that reliability in qualitative research is based on how the researcher collects data. Enhanced interrater coding involved a colleague to ensure reliability. To initiate the coding process, I used numeric codes to classify each sample syllabi with the course level to ensure confidentiality on an Excel spreadsheet. To further facilitate the coding process, my colleague and I standardized the coding process and added CSWE Competency 1 and the five practice behaviors, course content, dimensions, and institution type to the Excel spreadsheet. Once we were in agreement, I extracted data from three sample syllabi and entered it into the Excel spreadsheet and

emailed it to my colleague to review. After four consultations, we came to 100% agreement and I proceeded with the study. I employed these procedures and ethical practices to obtain documents that included methods of social work practice course syllabi at CSWE-accredited colleges or universities in the Southeast region of the United States. The data used to answer two research questions. The design supported a content analysis of the ethics curriculum in undergraduate social work programs in the U.S Southeast region to ensure dependability.

Confirmability refers to stable data and how qualitative researchers can admit to subjectivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested that researchers should explore their relationship in various aspects of a study. My interest in the research topic was aligned with my current work at a CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work program in Florida. I acknowledged the potential bias in selecting syllabi as the unit of analysis of data to be recorded. Strategies to counteract possible bias included immediate consultation with colleagues to identify and eliminate personal agendas, if any. Although I assumed the objective course syllabi data would mitigate potentially biased analysis, I consulted with others to address my possible biases in the study.

Ethical Procedures

This study did not include human participants. The unit of analysis was course syllabi from 19 CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. This research was approved through an exempt review by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB #02-27-20-0538524).

Each participating institution was assigned a numeric value for confidentiality. All data were safeguarded on a password-protected computer under lock and key and stored in a box. Data storage will be maintained for 5 years. Documentation of the IRB approval was requested at one institution, and I complied. Adherence to IRB was maintained throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

I am an undergraduate social work instructor at one of the CSWE-accredited universities in Florida. I obtained IRB approval at my work location and adhered to all pertinent requests in this study. Adherence to this process reduced the likelihood of conflict of interest or power differentials. Incentives were not offered in this study.

Summary

The goal of the study was to examine ethics content in course syllabi from 19 CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify ethics course content. An approved adapted version of the CSWE Sample Generalist Practice Curriculum Matrix was used to collect the data. Walden University's IRB approved the study before I collected and analyzed data. This study's design included the required components to address and sustain ethical research practices for quality studies in the social work profession.

Chapter 4 presents a description of the results of the study and includes personal or organizational conditions that may have influenced the collection of data. The specifics of how the data were obtained compared to the original plan are presented as well as a discussion of ethical issues and discrepant cases that emerged. Furthermore,

strategies to ensure trustworthiness and confidentiality are described. Finally, limitations and recommendations are discussed related to the peer-reviewed literature in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine ethics education requirements in the syllabi from practice courses at CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. To examine the inclusion of ethics education curriculum requirements within CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States, two research questions were addressed:

RQ1: How are the CSWE Competency 1 and the five practice behaviors represented in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the Southeast region of the United States?

RQ2: How is the ethics content infused in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the Southeast region of the United States?

The focus of this chapter is to describe the organizational settings, boundaries, and characteristics associated with the course syllabi. Second, I present a discussion of the data-gathering process, duration, and data instrument. Third, I discuss the open coding, data analysis, larger categories, emerging patterns, and qualities of four discrepant cases. Fourth, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability associated with trustworthiness are discussed. Finally, I discuss the findings pertinent to the two research questions addressing the undergraduate social work practice course syllabi at CSWE-accredited colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States.

Setting

The organizational setting for this study comprised CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in Southeast region of the United States. States in the southeast region include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The CSWE accredited BSW programs by state are listed in Appendix E.

Demographics

The sample included 19 CSWE-accredited BSW programs in 10 states including Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Of the 19 schools, nine were public and 10 were private institutions. The sample included 51 syllabi. The syllabi represented methods of social work practice courses I (n = 20), II (n = 18), and III (n = 13).

Data Collection

After the Walden University IRB granted approval for the study, an IRB-approved data user agreement and a modified site approval form were provided and presented to authorized site representatives. As an employee at one of the university sites, I adhered to IRB regulations. I obtained exempt status because it was a minimal risk study. Subsequently, I was granted access to three course syllabi. I assumed that the remaining course syllabi could be obtained from the school websites. However, that was not an option; therefore, an alternative plan was to contact the president of the Florida Social Work Consortium. I found that it was more beneficial to email deans, department chairs, and directors an invitation to participate in the study to access the course syllabi.

That decision resulted in access to 12 additional syllabi over a 4-month period. Due to the sample size, at this point the study remained open. However, data collection yielded only one additional syllabus over a 3-month period. Although I had originally planned to only include Florida in the study, that did not yield an adequate sample size. Due to the sample size of 16 syllabi at that point, I submitted a request for change in procedures to Walden University's IRB to expand the study to the Southeast region of the United States. After IRB granted approval to expand the sample frame, I proceeded with the study. Next, a telephone script was devised (see Appendix C) and implemented as a strategy to increase the sample size range of 20–50 course syllabi. Once again, I found that it was advantageous to email deans, department chairs, and directors an invitation to participate in the study to access the course syllabi. The email message can be found in Appendix D. That decision resulted in access to 35 additional course syllabi over a 2-week time frame. The result was a total sample of 51 Social Work Practice I, II, and III course syllabi (unit of analysis) collected from 19 undergraduate programs in the Southeast region of the United States, nine of which were public and 10 were private institutions.

I collected data biweekly over a period of 4 months, initially. Due to the number of sample syllabi obtained at that time, a subsequent data collection period occurred over a period of 3 months. After the subsequent period, I collected data for 2 additional weeks, and the data collection ended. As discussed in Chapter 3, the data collection instrument was the CSWE (2015) matrix (see Appendix A).

Prior to coding, I reviewed the syllabi multiple times to familiarize myself with the content. The data were recorded in three ways. First, an Excel spreadsheet was used

for open coding to establish key terms in a systematic manner that aligned with the two research questions. During a repeated review of the data, I determined the need to add four additional terms: two related to course content and two associated with aspects of dimensions. The four terms (*case study* and *quizzes* for content and *ethics* and *cognitive affective processes* for dimensions) were added to the instrument for data inclusiveness. Second, Dedoose software was used to create codes derived from the Excel spreadsheet. Next, I merged similar codes and refined the list to primary and secondary categories to answer the first research question and second research question. Third, the CSWE (2015) matrix Word document was used to record the collected data in the study (see Appendix A). This study did not include human subjects. Therefore, debriefs and follow-up procedures were not necessary.

Site variations were not included in the plan presented in Chapter 3. During the initial data collection period, a highly unusual circumstance occurred in mid-March 2020 (the coronavirus pandemic), which caused all U.S. colleges and universities to close (Hartocollis, 2020). Initially, the frequency and duration of data collection was maintained despite the unusual circumstance. However, the subsequent data collection period resulted in fewer sample syllabi than expected. Despite that, the frequency and duration of the final data collection were sustained.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I used an inductive analytic strategy (see Schwandt, 2015). According to O'Kane et al. (2021), "an inductive approach to analysis includes a wide variety of research activities such as exploring hunches, seeing and reflecting on patterns,

building codebooks, comparing across research units, and identifying key themes, to name a few" (p. 105). I implemented the inductive analytic strategy in three phases. First, I reviewed the two research questions and the instrument tool to create the Excel spreadsheet to ensure data continuity. Second, I imported the Excel spreadsheet for analysis facilitated by Dedoose Version 8.3.17. Next, I imported the text of the sample syllabi. From there, 54 codes were generated based on the text of the syllabi. These 54 codes were applied throughout the text of the sample syllabi, which generated 572 excerpts. Third, the 54 codes were categorized. Harding (2013) suggested that codes can be situated in one or more categories to provide clarity. Accordingly, I created one primary category followed by five subcategories-1 and 14 subcategories-2 to answer the first research question. I created one primary category followed by four subcategories-1 and 15 subcategories-2 to answer the second research question.

The primary category for RQ1 was the existence of CSWE Competency 1: demonstrate ethical and professional behaviors. I identified the existence of CSWE Competency 1 by reviewing the learning outcomes, designated areas for CSWE EPAS competencies, course objectives, course descriptions, program goals, and the social work program's mission statements in the sample syllabi. The five subcategories-1 reflected the presence of the five CSWE practice behaviors (PB): (a) PB1 - make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context; (b) PB2 - use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations; (c) PB3 -

demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and oral, written, and electronic communication; (d) PB4 - use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and (e) PB5 - use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior. I identified the presence of the practice behaviors by reviewing sections of the sample syllabi that combined the CSWE Competency 1 and the practice behaviors, some of which were illustrated in a matrix, while others were listed in the course objectives, learning outcomes, or assignments or were broadly defined in the sample syllabi. The 14 subcategories-2 reflected further specification including (a) assignment, (b) case studies, (c) class activity, (d) module, (e) readings, (f) exams, (g) service learning, (h) ability, (i) awareness, (j) ethics, (k) knowledge, (l) skills, (m) values, and (n) cognitive and affective processes. I identified this information by reviewing the sections for assignments, basis for student evaluations, matrix, course requirements, student activities, required textbook, and course schedules followed by learning outcomes, course descriptions, course objectives, and specific language associated with the competency dimensions.

The primary category for RQ2 was the existence of ethics-infused content. The 15 subcategories-2 reflected further specification including (a) assignment, (b) case studies, (c) class activity, (d) module, (e) readings, (f) quizzes, (g) exams, (h) service learning, (i) ability, (j) awareness, (k) ethics, (l) knowledge, (m) skills, (n) values, and (o) cognitive and affective processes. I identified this information by reviewing the sections for assignments, course requirements, learning checks, course material, methods of evaluations, key performance indicators, required course assignment, basis for student

evaluation, required text/textbook, methods of instruction, course descriptions, social work student standards, mental and emotional abilities, nature of course, rationale, grading criteria, and specific language aligned with competency dimensions.

Next, I identified patterns. Saldana (2016) described a sequence of data that occurred at least three times as a pattern. The patterns related to the first research question were (a) CSWE Competency 1 and practice behaviors, (b) course content, and (c) dimensions. The patterns related to the second research question were (a) ethics-infused content (EIC), (b) EIC representation, and (c) EIC dimensions. The patterns are fully described with examples in the results section.

Discrepant Cases

Most syllabi followed a distinct pattern of identification as Social Work Practice I, II, and III; however, five discrepant cases were identified. One was identified as Practice Level 1-A, which involved a skills lab related to the Methods I course. Also dissimilar was a syllabus identified as a Practice Level IV course. The latter followed a course sequence of Methods I (micro), Methods II (mezzo [family]), Methods III (mezzo [group]), and Methods IV (macro [community and organizations]). The next discrepant case was identified as a Methods II course but followed the content of a Methods III course (macro). A fourth discrepant case was identified as a Methods I course but included both practice with individuals (micro) as well as concepts for families and groups (mezzo). The final discrepant case was identified as a Methods III course that followed the content of Methods II (mezzo). The discrepant cases encountered during the data analysis were identified by classifying the syllabus's lack of similarity with the

standard practice level courses I, II, and III. The content within the discrepant syllabi was consistent with the rest of the sample but used different labeling and was therefore deemed discrepant in the study. None of the discrepant cases were found to create problems in the data analysis and were factored into the analysis in keeping with the content of the material.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four criteria to judge qualitative research design to ensure trustworthiness of results: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The credibility of qualitative inquiries relies on the internal validity to ensure the study measures what it actually intended. Krippendorff and Craggs (2016) maintained that structured procedures involving human coders are necessary to demonstrate how units of analysis are categorized. Strategies compatible with the design, instrument, and data contribute to increased validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used an Excel spreadsheet to identify and label data from 19 CSWE-accredited universities in the Southeast region of the United States. I used digital and hard copies to augment data collection for the establishment of categories and subcategories as procedural guides to analyze the data (see Saldana, 2016). I found this strategy advantageous for continuity of data. I incorporated a second method to include the CSWE (2015) matrix for undergraduate social work programs to repeat patterns of observation. These procedures contributed to credibility.

Transferability in qualitative research can be realized in the context of a setting because the transferability of the findings can aide in understanding the results and

applying them outside the sample (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The transferability strategies that I implemented included adherence to ethical research standards and practices for the inclusion of 51 relevant syllabi. The findings of this qualitative study are unique in that they do not represent a large population, but rather 51 undergraduate social work course syllabi from 19 CSWE-accredited universities in the Southeast region of the United States. The data collection process may not be useful for others because this study was specific to the Southeast region of the United States and included documents and instruments via the approval granted by authorized site representatives. I used Dedoose to analyze the data to strengthen the transferability of the study.

Dependability is essential in qualitative research studies. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), reliability in qualitative research is contingent on how the researcher strategically collects data. As the sole data collector for this study, I engaged in repeated reviews of the Excel spreadsheet and the CSWE (2015) matrix to align the two research questions with data gathering, coding, and analysis. Upon recognition that two terms for dimensions (ethics and cognitive effective and processes) and two terms for course content (case study and quizzes) were missing, a second person was notified to ensure reliability. My university colleague's independent review resulted in 100% agreement with my original conclusions. This strategy was used to mitigate the potential concerns associated with interrater coding. This strategy helped with accountability for effective processes to safeguard dependability.

Confirmability refers to data stabilization in ways in which qualitative researchers deal with self-regulation amid subjectivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As a member of the

academic community, I was mindful of the relationship in many aspects of the study at the outset. I implemented two strategies to counteract potential bias. One strategy was regular consultation with trusted colleagues to help me identify and eliminate possible subjectivity. The second strategy was a memo function in Dedoose where I recorded my thoughts throughout the coding and categorizing process. As expected, the data in the course syllabi were concise, which helped to mitigate bias with data collection and analysis. An additional strategy, not discussed in Chapter 3, included the review of the required textbooks that were listed in the sample syllabi. As a member of the academic community, I registered in VitalSource and gained access to textbooks listed in the sample syllabi. This strategy enhanced my objective approach to reviewing table of contents in the required textbooks to verify ethics-infused content in readings.

Results

Fifty-one course syllabi were analyzed in this qualitative study to examine the inclusion of ethics education within CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs.

Research Question 1

The first research question addressed the manner in which CSWE competency 1 and the five practice behaviors were represented in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses within the sample of private and public institutions in the southeast region of the U.S. Thirty-six syllabi used explicit competency 1 and practice behavior language; those 36 are reflected in RQ1 results. A synopsis of data related to RQ1 is located in Appendix F.

Pattern 1: Overall Representation of CSWE Competency 1 and Practice Behaviors

This pattern is defined as the representation of competency 1 and all five practice behaviors related to course level. Of the 51 sample syllabi, 36 demonstrated application of CSWE competency 1 and practice behaviors. CSWE competency 1 and practice behaviors were represented across all three courses; methods of social work practice I, II, and III. This may be significant because CSWE's first competency is accompanied by value-laden language to guide ethical practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Competency 1 Representation

Table 1 demonstrates the frequency and percent representation of competency 1 in social work methods I, II, and III courses.

Table 1

Frequency of Competency I Reflected in Methods Courses

Methods course level	Frequency	Percentage
Methods I	16	44%
Methods II	13	36%
Methods III	7	19%

Higher frequency is demonstrated in Methods I and the relevance may be seen there as the purpose of the course is to introduce students to generalist practice at the micro level. Methods II typically emphasizes generalist practice with families and groups at the mezzo level. Although competency 1 was represented less frequently in Methods III syllabi, this may be an indication that the competency has been emphasized in the prerequisites and so requires less direct attention related to macro practice.

Practice Behavior Representation

Table 2 demonstrates the total frequency representation of the five practice behaviors.

Table 2

Total Frequency of Practice Behaviors

Practice behaviors (PB)	Frequency
PB 1	23
PB 2	23
PB 3	25
PB 4	14
PB 5	13

The frequency for PB 1 and PB 2 were the same. This may be relevant as those PBs most directly align to standards in the NASW Code of Ethics and self-awareness. The highest code count was represented in PB 3. The significance of this may be viewed in light of the expected actions for professional behavior. Although the count for PB 4 was somewhat lower, this may be viewed as developing along with the rise of new technology in contemporary social work practice. Finally, PB 5 demonstrated the lowest frequency. This may be related to the larger context that students have yet to begin their practicums or internships but use supervision and other resources in classroom settings and service-learning environments.

Pattern 2: Competency 1 and Practice Behaviors in Course Content

Pattern two reflects competency 1 and practice behaviors as seen in course content. The course content was applicable to ethics across all three practice courses and included: (a) readings; (b) assignments; (c) modules; (d) case studies; (e) exams; (f) class

activity; and (g) service learning. Table 3 shows frequencies related to how sample syllabi included ethics material into course content.

Table 3

Frequency of Inclusion of Ethics Material

Course content	Frequency
Readings	35
Assignments	59
Modules	13
Case studies	14
Exams	35
Class activities	42
Service learning	6

Readings related to ethics content in sample syllabi were identified through examination of the weekly course schedule. The representation of ethics content was verified in each of the required textbooks via the table of contents using VitalSource (www.bookshelf.vitalsource.com).

Assignments were vastly represented in all practice level courses. Two specific assignments relevant to ethics in methods I courses included: (a) fellow student interviews; and (b) biopsychosocial spiritual assessments. Fellow student interviews included 5-30-minute video recordings for analysis of professional boundaries through self-reflection and self-regulation to address personal biases. Peer interviews also included a requirement to exhibit NASW (2017) Code of Ethics during interviews. Biopsychosocial spiritual assessments included opportunities for students to identify a model for ethical decision-making in micro practice. Emphasis focused on ensuring

informed consent during biopsychosocial spiritual assessments. An example of instructions related to peer interviews was:

> Students are to interview a fellow student while being videotaped. Approximately 7-10 minutes in length. These are not clinical interviews. The focus of the interview is to get to know the interviewee while practicing your interviewing skills. Be sure to ensure confidentiality for the interviewee.

The inclusion of ethics in the instructions for the biopsychosocial spiritual assessments suggested:

> recording the Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Assessment: 1. Student will select a client who will consent to the assessment and recording by signing the appropriate form, 2. Informed Consent form is signed by the client and witnessed by the student, 3. Client can be a friend, family etc. Client will be reading from a script written by the student. Client will not be graded, 4. Script must cover the four domains and demonstrate the use of generalist intervention model when conducting a Bio-Psycho-Social, Spiritual Assessment.

It is important to note that emphasis was placed on non-clinical interviews to maintain a focus on generalist practice and confidentiality. Another noteworthy point was the step-by-step process that guided the student's ethical decision-making to ensure consent for service.

Assignments relevant to ethics content in methods II courses included: (a) family assessments; (b) family genograms; (c) ecomaps; (d) ecograms; and (e) family images; and (f) papers. An array of assignments applicable to working with families are critically

important because students come from different backgrounds and today's family composition will vary. However, ethical obligations are not optional. Group assignments included the following: (a) group designs; (b) group presentations; (c) reflections journal; (d) process recordings; (f) group simulations; and (g) analysis papers. An example of competency 1 inclusion in assignments was: "the purpose of these journals is for the student to discuss something that has contributed to their self-awareness . . . As demonstrated by: Ability to reflect upon personal values and how they may bias practice." Another instruction indicated "the paper describes the prevention interventions that enhanced client capacities, and how to solve problems – Apply two NASW Code of Ethics," while another required the student to "understand and demonstrate, through group simulation and observation, how values and ethics are applied to group practice."

Assignments related to ethics content in methods III syllabi included: (a) grant proposals; (b) community action projects; (c) neighborhood assessments; (d) papers; (e) presentations; (f) program development and evaluation; and (g) ethics assignment. These assignments are relevant because they focus on macro practice that encompass ethical decision-making. One example of a community assessment with an agency as a case included the requirement of "exploring existing or possible ethical issues that arise from this case."

Class activity-related ethics content in methods I courses included: (a) active learning exercise; (b) recorded interviews for acting out scenarios; (c) PowerPoint presentations; (d) Mindtap activities (a digital learning platform of Cengage publishers

where students are given access to web content related to specific texts); (e) videos; and (f) ethics exercise. One example for ethics activities/exercises included:

> This exercise highlights conflict between client and worker over the best intervention for an identified problem. As the worker, your recommendation is based upon sound research and the most up-to-date information available. The client's decision is based upon questionable judgment and inaccurate information. As in the other exercises, your opinion of what should be done will need to be guided by the Code of Ethics and the ethical principles screen ETHICS for U.

Another example involved the use of Mindtap.

> Mindtap Activities (Competencies – 1[B3-B4]) Students are required to complete the activities associated with chapters 3, 4, 9, 10, 14, & 15. Students are required to complete the video activity associated with each chapter. The activities reinforce knowledge gained from the readings and allow students to practice recalling and relating the information to chapter materials. The activities allow students to demonstrate ethical decision making, use reflection and utilize technology in an ethical and appropriate manner.

Class activity-related to ethics content in methods II sample syllabi included: (a) video recorded role-plays; (b) group movie proposals; (c) presentations; and (d) avatar-based role-plays. An example included the use of simulation to apply ethics content:

> Using avatar simulation (Mursion) this activity engages students on how to effectively terminate a group, apply NASW (2017) Code of Ethics, conduct a

process evaluation of a group, and various approaches to evaluating the outcome of a group in social work practice.

This is an indication of technological advances for teaching ethics in undergraduate social work courses to prepare students for group work prior to field practice.

Class activity related to ethics content in methods III sample syllabi included: (a) small group reflection activities; (b) PowerPoint presentations; and (c) community action projects; and (d) community data gathering. One unique way ethics content was included in a practice III course comprised the acts of forming small groups to prepare students to engage in a social change project. For example, instructions included: "Forming Your Groups – This is where you will form your group for the social change project." And "Identifying ethical data collection and management in work with communities and groups."

Specific modules related to ethics content in sample syllabi across all three course levels included: (a) peer discussions; (b) self-reflections related to ethics; (c) and discussion boards that involved tasks via virtual learning. Modules also focused on individuals and family dynamics as well as an array of ethical dilemma within communities and organizations.

Traditional approaches for case studies related to ethics content were represented throughout all course levels. However, due to limited content in sample syllabi, the specifics of case studies were seldom identified, and the analysis of ethical dilemmas were noted in a broad range. Nevertheless, contemporary issues related to ethics obligations with older adults and those involved in the child welfare system were

identified. Likewise, exams-related to ethics content in sample syllabi focused on (a) ethics related to textbook chapter readings; (b) case studies; (c) case analysis reflection; and (d) the inclusiveness of the NASW Code of Ethics. It is worth noting that weekly course schedules aligned chapters readings related to ethics to mid-terms and final exams.

Service learning related to ethics content in sample syllabi primarily focused on mezzo and macro level practice and included: (a) treatment group observations; (b) town hall meetings; and (c) community events. Other service-learning practice activities were at the discretion of the professor or instructor, but the specific content was not consistently revealed in the sample syllabi.

Pattern 3: Dimensions of Competency 1 Represented in Course Content

Pattern three is defined in terms of which dimensions of competency 1 were represented in course content. Dimensions were represented across all three practice course levels. The dimensions for demonstrating the development of competency 1 are: (a) knowledge; (b) values; (c) skills; (d) cognitive and affective processes; (e) ethics; (f) ability; and (g) awareness. Table 4 provides frequencies and percentages related to representation of the dimensions of competency 1 and practice behaviors in the sample syllabi.

Table 4

Dimensions Definitions, Frequency, and Percentage of Syllabi for Research Question 1

Dimension	Brief definition	Methods level	Frequency	Percentage
Knowledge	Facts related to knowledge needed for ethical decision-making in generalist practice.	I II III	15 13 7	42% 36% 19%
Values	Professional values aligned with the NASW Code of Ethics.	I II III	16 13 7	44% 36% 19%
Skills	Skills related to ethical decision-making in generalist practice.	I II III	14 12 7	39% 33% 19%
Cognitive and affective processes	Critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgement	I II III	8 7 5	22% 19% 14%
Ethics	Ethics directly informed by the EPAS/NASW Code of Ethics.	I II III	10 7 3	28% 19% 8%
Ability	Demonstrate the ability to communicate information effectively.	I II III	4 5 3	11% 14% 8%
Awareness	Aware of personal values and biases to increase self-awareness.	I II III	5 5 1	14% 14% 3%

Research Question 2

The second research question addressed how ethics content is infused in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the southeast region of the U.S. Syllabi used to answer RQ2 were differentiated from those used to answer RQ1 based on language. Of the total sample (*N*=51), 15 syllabi infused ethics content but the specific connection between competency 1 and practice behavior language was not obvious in the syllabi. Therefore, these 15 syllabi were analyzed to answer RQ2. A synopsis of data related to RQ2 is located in Appendix G.

Pattern 1: EIC in Methods of Social Work Practice Courses

This pattern is defined as the representation of EIC related to course level. Of the 51 sample syllabi, 15 demonstrated application of EIC and was represented across all three courses; methods of social work practice I, II, and III. This may be significant because EIC increased at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

EIC Representation

Table 5 demonstrates the frequency and percent representation of EIC in social work methods I, II, and III courses.

Table 5

Frequency of EIC in Methods Courses

Methods course level	Frequency	Percentage
Methods I	4	27%
Methods II	5	33%
Methods III	6	40%

Pattern 2: Course Content for EIC

Pattern two is defined as the corresponding aspects of course content demonstrated through infusion. The course content was applicable across all three practice levels and represented through: (a) readings; (b) assignments; (c) modules; (d) case studies; (e) exam; (f) quizzes; (g) class activity; and (h) service learning. Frequencies are provided in Table 6 followed by a discussion of the content and selected examples.

Table 6

Frequency of EIC Material

Course content	Frequency
Readings	11
Assignments	21
Modules	3
Case studies	6
Exam	8
Quizzes	5
Class activities	14
Service learning	9

Readings related to ethics infused content was verified in each of the required textbooks via the table of contents using VitalSource (www.bookshelf.vitalsource.com). Three of the most commonly used textbooks in micro, mezzo, and macro courses, respectively, were:

1. Lowenburg, F. M. & Dolgoff, R. (2012). E*thical decisions for social work practice* (9th ed.). F. E. Peacock Publishers;
2. Corey, M. S., Corey, G., & Corey, C. (2014). *Group: Process and practice* (10th ed.). Brooks/Cole;

3. Kirst-Ashman, K. K., & Hull, G. H. (2014). *Generalist practice with organizations and communities* (6th ed.). Brooks/Cole.

Emphasis focused on ethics were outlined in the weekly course schedules that aligned with chapter readings to ensure continuity.

Assignments related to ethics infused content were represented in all practice level courses encompassing micro, mezzo and macro. The assignments relevant to ethics in practice I courses included: (a) biopsychosocial history and treatment plan; (b) biopsychosocial spiritual history; and (c) interviews; and (d) papers. An example of ethics-infused assignments included:

> biopsychosocial and treatment plan using themselves as the client. The purpose of the biopsychosocial history assignment . . . is for students to . . . demonstrate an understanding of the core concepts of generalist social work practice, . . . identify the basis for intervention and prevention, . . . demonstrate the ability to communicate information effectively, . . . become more aware of personal values and biases to increase self -awareness.

Another instruction indicated, “demonstrate professional boundaries when recording personal information.”

Assignments related to ethics infused content for methods II courses included: (a) attend community group meetings; (b) presentations; (c) interviews; (d) small group presentations; (e) reflection papers; (f) small group co-leader); and (g) family assessments. The ethics infused instructions for group observations suggested:

> a 3-page typewritten summary of each observation experience. Papers must include: challenges in arranging an observation, group type, specific purpose, number of participants, location . . . facilitator information and credentials, . . . stage of development . . . summary . . . interaction (while maintaining confidentiality), diversity noticed among group members, a discussion of your own personal biases . . . discussion of professional value conflicts or ethical dilemmas that might arise.

Emphasis focused on ethics in group formation included aspects of privacy, cultural diversity, cultural humility and self-reflections for group intervention.

Assignments related to ethics infused content for methods III courses included: (a) community indicator data; (b) agency/service assessment; (c) grant proposals; (d) papers; and (e) attend a community meeting. These assignments are relevant because they focus on community data gathering, agency interactions, and human and fiscal resources for grant proposal that encompass ethical decision-making. An example included the use of grant writing to infuse ethics content:

> Students will research and investigate opportunities that enhance or promote the need for an assigned program and then write a grant proposal that will be submitted in writing and presented to a mock grant determination panel. Included will be identified plan of assessment and evaluation. Also included will be actions needed to achieve organizational or community goals of the grant. Deal with ethical issues related to diversity utilizing professional standards and ethics in evaluating one's practice.

Another example involved the use of grant writing.

> Prepare a proposal for grant funding by responding to a mock 'Request for Proposal' issued by a Philanthropic Foundation. . . . All participation in the course must be in accordance with the principles and standards of conduct contained in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics.

Modules related to ethics infused content in sample syllabi for courses I and III included: (a) peer discussions; (b) discussion boards; (c) YouTube clips; (d) vignettes; and (e) videos. An example for instructions included: "Online Discussions with Peer Responses." "The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics will be followed."

Another example involved the use of modules.

> In this module, we will review the NASW Code of Ethics and how it applies to organizations and communities. We will use ethical reasoning strategies to help guide ethical decision making. Together we will appraise a range of Macro ethical dilemmas and propose viable options to address these difficulties.

Exams related to ethics infused content in practice courses I, II, and III for mid-terms and final exams included: (a) traditional academic exams; (b) final projects; (c) final presentations; (d) a combination of both final projects and presentations; and final analysis papers. An example for ethics infused exams indicated: "Mid-terms and final exams will cover assigned readings, videotapes and handouts." Of note is that the example described included NASW Code of Ethics/values in the weekly course schedule.

This implies that ethics education was presented to students from the beginning to the end of the course.

Case studies related to ethics infused content in practice courses I and II included cases that concentrated on issues from child welfare to older adults. An example using case studies to infuse ethics indicated:

> Students will be assisted in the beginning development of such skills as self-awareness, personal values, communication, observation, building a professional helping relationship, assessment, planning intervention, understanding of impact of personal belief system on practice, for the purpose of evidence-based practice, identification of ethical conflicts and ability to use ethical decision-making model, evaluation and termination.

Another example involved the use of case study.

> Process case study psychosocial, focusing on evaluation of family and community dynamics. Make ethical decisions by applying standards of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics and, as applicable, of the International Federation of Social Workers/International Association of Schools of Social Work Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles.

Quizzes related to ethics infused content in practice courses I, II, and II included traditional and non-traditional approaches. An example included the use of short quizzes to apply ethics content:

> Learning Checks: Three learning check assignments (multiple choice and short answer) will be given to students throughout the semester covering only required

> reading material posted in the syllabus. Lectures throughout the course focus on required reading material. Learning checks are designed for students to demonstrate a general foundation to working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Each learning check is valued at a maximum of 10 points. The quizzes were aligned with required readings in the textbook that coved ethics to streamline the information.

Class activities relevant to ethics infused content in methods II and III courses included: (a) in-class activities; (b) culturally sensitive videos; (c) small group activities; and (d) role plays. An example, instructions included:

> In a small group, you will be assigned an ethical dilemma. Using the steps in addressing ethical decision making, work with your group in finding the best solution to the problem. Remember, ethical dilemmas are not black and white. A resolution may not always meet everyone's standards. Instead, it should align with the social work profession, moral duties, and obligations.

Service learning related to ethics infused content in practice courses I and III included community service-learning projects. An example for instruction included:

> Students are required to arrange to visit an agency in the community and, for 15 hours, shadow a staff member who has a BSW and/or MSW who is involved in case work and/or group work. Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.

Another example involved the use of service-learning project.

> Complete a community service-learning project. Students will work in groups to complete a short-term community service project, working in collaboration with an agency or organization in our community. The project will be completed in a step-by-step planned and orderly process which will be discussed in lecture and class discussions.

In summary, pattern two represented the infusion of ethics across all three courses and eight content areas. The EIC consisted of traditional and non-traditional approaches to teaching ethical decision-making to undergraduate social work students in preparation for field practice. The commonly used textbooks included ethics content to augment weekly class material. The NASW Code of Ethics was consistently emphasized in the 15 sample syllabi.

Pattern 3: Dimensions for EIC

Pattern three is defined in terms of differences with which dimensions of ethics infused content is represented in course content. The following included: (a) knowledge; (b) skills; (c) values; (d) cognitive and affective processes; (e) ethics; (f) ability; and (g) awareness. Table 7 provides dimension definitions, frequencies and percentages related to representation EIC content in the sample syllabi.

Table 7

Dimensions Definitions, Frequency, and Percentage of Syllabi for Research Question 2

Dimension	Brief definition	Methods level	Frequency	Percentage
Knowledge	Facts related to knowledge needed for ethical decision-making in generalist practice.	I	4	27%
		II	5	33%
		III	6	4%
Values	Professional values aligned with the NASW Code of Ethics.	I	4	27%
		II	4	27%
		III	6	4%
Skills	Skills related to ethical decision-making in generalist practice.	I	4	27%
		II	5	33%
		III	6	4%
Cognitive and affective processes	Critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgement	I	0	0%
		II	0	0%
		III	1	.7%
Ethics	Ethics directly informed by the EPAS/NASW Code of Ethics.	I	4	27%
		II	3	2%
		III	3	2%
Ability	Demonstrate the ability to communicate information effectively.	I	2	13%
		II	2	13%
		III	2	13%
Awareness	Aware of personal values and biases to increase self-awareness.	I	2	13%
		II	0	0%
		III	2	13%

Summary

The research examined how CSWE competency 1 and the five practice behaviors are represented in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the southeast region of the United States. Of 51 total syllabi, 36 syllabi were used to answer RQ1 and indicated that competency 1 had the highest frequency (*n*=16) of infusion in the Methods I practice sample syllabi, followed by a slightly less frequency (*n*=13), in Methods II, and the lowest frequency (*n*=7), in Methods III sample syllabi. This is relevant because it may signify that competency 1 was emphasized more in practice I and II and less emphasis in practice III.

The results for the five PBs represented different frequencies in some aspects, and the same in others. For example, PB 1 and PB 2 represented equal frequencies (*n*=23). However, PB 3 indicated the highest frequency (*n*=25), followed by PB 4 with less frequency (*n*=14), and lastly, PB 5 indicated the lowest frequency (*n*=13). The relevance may indicate that the first two PBs are closely aligned with the ethical decision-making process in relation to gaining self-awareness to maintain professionalism in social work practice. The relevance to the third PB may indicate a central focus for ongoing observable professional behaviors. The relevance of the last two PBs may indicate the increasing challenges with ethical use of technology in relation to practice outcomes through supervision and consultation.

The research also examined how ethics content is infused in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work practice courses at private and public institutions in the southeast region of the United States. Of 51 syllabi, 15 sample syllabi were used to

answer RQ2 and indicated the lowest frequency (*n*=4) of infusion in the Methods I practice sample syllabi, but higher a frequency (*n*=5), in Methods II, and the highest frequency (*n*=6) in Methods III sample syllabi. Unlike the frequency patterns described in the previous section, the opposite patterns occurred when EPAS competency language was not used. The relevance may indicate that the infusion of ethics is more prominent in Methods III sample syllabi (macro-focused), followed by Methods II (mezzo- focused), and then Methods I practice (micro-focused). The course content for EIC results indicate assignments (*n*=21), class activities (*n*=14), readings (*n*=11), services learning (*n*=9), exam (*n*=8), case studies (*n*=6), quizzes (*n*=5), and modules (*n*=3). The relevance may indicate the manner in which ethics is infused in course content.

Chapter 5 presents the interpretation of the findings, limitations, and recommendations for future studies on content analysis of ethics curriculum requirements in undergraduate social work programs, and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to examine ethics content in the syllabi of practice courses at CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. The nature of the study was a content analysis of 51 syllabi. The study was conducted to identify the integration or infusion of ethics curriculum in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. There were two key findings from the study:

1. BSW programs in this study demonstrated frequent representation of CSWE Competency 1 and PBs related to ethics content in methods courses, with the highest frequency occurring in Methods 1; even programs that did not have language specific to Competency 1 or the PBs had a significant infusion of ethics content.
2. BSW programs in this study most frequently represented Competency 1 and PBs 3, 1, 2, 4 and 5 (in order of representation) and infused-ethics content through course readings, assignments, class activities, and case studies.

Interpretation of the Findings

Although some peer-reviewed research regarding ethics education in CSWE-accredited social work programs was identified, most research had been conducted on ethics education in graduate programs. Fossen et al. (2014) noted the importance of an ethical decision-making model, known as the ETHICA model (Congress 1999, 2000), in undergraduate social work programs. The current study's findings demonstrated that it may be easier to apply Competency 1 and practice behaviors at the generalist practice

level (individual and family/group). The findings may also suggest that less attention is given to Competency 1 and practice behaviors once students have moved beyond the first two stages of generalist practice (individual and family/group). Students may translate Methods I content to the other practice levels without additional focus on ethics. Further, the findings demonstrated that teaching methods for infusing the ethics content are used. Active learning activities such as case studies, class activities, and service learning were frequently demonstrated.

As mentioned in the literature review, there was limited research on ethics education in undergraduate social work programs; therefore, the literature review was expanded to include three other social science disciplines: psychology, counseling education, and nursing. Like social work, these disciplines have professional accreditation standards to guide ethical decision-making for students and practitioners. For example, in references to approaches, content, and methods for including ethics education in their accredited programs, the literature showed that the psychology discipline is challenged with where to include ethics in their curricula (Barber & Bagsby, 2012; You et al., 2018), but indicated ethics content in assignments and books (Griffith et al., 2014). For counselor education, ethical decision-making models are used to infuse ethics content to enhance student learning for professional development (Sanabria & Murray, 2018), and reflective writing assignments to enhance cognitive complexities via ethics education (Kimball & Daniel, 2020). However, ethics related to gatekeeping was noted as a challenge with the counselor education's lack of support to doctoral-level students (M. C. Rapp et al., 2018). Nursing education faces challenges with educating

nurses, including psychiatric nurses, on identifying ethical dilemmas upon graduating from nursing programs (Chao et al., 2017; Park, 2012). However, a stand-alone nursing ethics course offered a modern-day approach to teach ethics including effectiveness measures (Chao et al., 2017).

It was not surprising to learn about the challenges of professional ethics faced by three other disciplines. Reamer (2020) echoed similar concerns within human services, including but not limited to the aforementioned disciplines, and further noted the importance of teaching professional ethics in academia. The current study extended knowledge in the social work discipline by providing qualitative data and analysis regarding how ethics is represented and infused in the course content of Methods I, II, and III practice courses in CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. The literature confirmed CSWE's ongoing commitment to enhancing the social work curriculum, specifically in a practice course (Hines, 2004) and the use of content analysis.

The current study's findings aligned with the theoretical framework of common morality theory (see Gert, 1998). The findings reflected this theory's context, which is based on a moral system and rational assumptions of individuals. In this case, undergraduate social work students have a natural tendency to reduce harm to others (Gert, 1998), a focus found to be included in their education for generalist social work practice. Common morality theory (see Lundgren, 2015) also helped guide the study using the language in Competency 1, the five PBs, and EIC, per CSWE (2015) mandates. CSWE (2015) Competency 1 requires students to understand and demonstrate ethical and professional behavior at the graduate and undergraduate levels. As such, the rational

assumption (Gert, 1998) is that BSW students have the propensity to understand and recognize the value base of the social work profession and adhere to ethical decision-making with individuals, families or groups, communities, and organizations to reduce harm.

The current study's findings also aligned with the theoretical framework of curriculum theory (see Lundgren, 2015). The findings reflected this theory's context, which is based on goals, aspects of knowledge, and the selection and organization of knowledge through historical constructs. The application of curriculum theory helped guide the study's findings on how ethics content was represented and infused in 51 sample syllabi using content analysis that paralleled CSWE's historical efforts with standards for curriculum policy (see Hines, 2004), all of which led to curriculum development for today's generalist practice.

Limitations of the Study

There were five limitations to this study. First, the sample size was limited to 51 sample syllabi. The results cannot be generalized to other contexts beyond the 19 colleges and universities in the 10 states within the Southeast region of the United States. Additionally, some schools in the sample used simulation, a web-based digital learning platform, and community indicator data to infuse ethics content; these aspects may differentiate the sample even further. Second, I used content analysis, which did not allow for clarifications or follow-up questions related to the content. Third, I focused only on Methods I, II, and III practice courses; therefore, the study did not represent ethics in other undergraduate social work courses. According to the literature,

gerontology, criminal justice, and human services courses often include ethics content (Camp et al., 2018; Mackey & Levan, 2019; Wark et al., 2019). Fourth, I included only Competency 1, but ethics education can also be infused using other competencies per CSWE (2015) mandates; these could include Competency 2 on diversity, Competency 4 on practice-informed research, and Competency 5 on policy. Fifth, I did not include any discrete or stand-alone ethics courses in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given NASW's (2017) emphasis on ethics and CSWE (2015) mandates, further research is needed to understand better how ethics is infused in undergraduate social work programs. Although some research had been conducted on ethics education in CSWE-accredited graduate social work programs, there was little empirical evidence on CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs. Research including a larger and more representative throughout the United States would be beneficial. Research identifying how often programs use a discrete course approach versus infusion or a mixed approach to teach ethics content would also provide useful knowledge. Future research could also provide guidance on the efficacy of providing ethics content across the three teaching approaches to support program development. A final recommendation for future research includes confirming each program's accreditation year on the CSWE public website. This confirmation would help clarify the broadly defined language regarding competencies and practice behaviors in the sample syllabi.

Implications

There are three ways to examine the implications for positive social change. The first is through the lens of higher education. The second is through generalist social work practice at the individual, family, organizational, and societal/policy levels. The third is through conducting social work research that contributes to the ethics education.

Social Work Education

Including ethics content in Methods I, II, and III practice level courses could advance the social work profession to improve ethical decision-making on the individual, family/group, community, and organization levels. BSW program administrators could use the study's findings in four ways. First, administrators could ensure ethics content infusion is consistently represented across Methods I, II, and III practice courses. Second, administrators could use the results of PB 4 that showed a low frequency rate to increase the likelihood of ethical use of technology amid rising concerns in the profession (Reamer, 2018), and PB5 that showed the lowest frequency as an indication to either confirm or enhance course content amid growing concerns related to boundary violations in human services (Reamer, 2020). Third, administrators could ensure the dimensions of cognitive and affective processes are consistently included in syllabi to develop Competency 1 and be mindful of low frequency rates with ethics, ability, and awareness.

Regarding EIC, the study's findings could be used to affirm ethics infusion in Methods III courses to help students prepare for contemporary social work complexities at the community, organizational, and policy levels. However, the lower frequency rates for EIC in Methods I and II courses could serve as an opportunity for BSW program

administrators to work collaboratively with their full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and others involved with curriculum enhancements to ensure a balance of ethics infusion for generalist practice across methods level (individual, family, group, community, and organization). Faculty members could find ways to teach ethics content that addresses different learning styles to make content relevant and available to all students (Childs-Kean et al., 2020). Giving students opportunities to place themselves in a professional position and practice decision-making skills, which entails applying ethical standards, is a positive learning experience (L. Rapp & Anyikwa, 2016). Regarding educational policy implications, the CSWE may use the study's findings to assist BSW program faculty with using a standardized matrix to illustrate competencies, specific PB, and dimensions to align ethics course content.

Social Work Practice

Practice recommendations include recognizing the need to make ethics education a priority for students' preparedness in generalist practice amid a rapidly changing and complex society. Ethics education may support positive social change through ongoing assessment of Competency 1, PBs, and dimensions for student preparedness at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. The NASW could use these findings to highlight the importance of the field instructors' role to ensure the continuity of ethics education in professional practice. BSW-level practitioners are often employed in practice settings fraught with ethical dilemmas such as child welfare, older adults, and criminal justice (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). These job placement realities make ethics content in BSW education even more critical.

Social Work Research

The implications for using a qualitative methodology, including content analysis, aligned with common morality theory (Gert, 1998) and curriculum theory (Lundgren, 2015) may address the gap in empirical evidence for this phenomenon. Content analysis aligned with both theories in that the common morality theory described values and ethics of a moral system within U.S. society that depends on the rational assumption that people are imperfect but also have the potential to reduce harm, and curriculum theory explained how ethics are taught using the five CSWE (2015) practice behaviors that predicted knowledge and categorization of content in the sample syllabi. This process may help with student preparedness and could contribute to social change. Further, Padgett (2017) suggested that additional qualitative research in social work is needed, similar to the current study. Qualitative research may more closely align with positive social change because of the inclusion of the voices of marginalized populations.

Conclusions

Social work ethics education must be a priority as the next generation of social workers is trained. Reamer (2018) noted the commitments of NASW, CSWE, the Association of Social Work Boards, and the Clinical Social Work Association as a move in the right direction to address ethical concerns, especially as social workers' use of technology increases. Reamer (2020) also expressed more recent concerns about the importance of education regarding the critical ethical issues surrounding boundary violations in practice. The current study showed how 19 BSW programs implement CSWE's commitment to ethics education in social work practice courses amid changes in

U.S. society. Findings from this study indicated ethics course content in sample syllabi, including how nine public and 10 private CSWE-accredited colleges and universities embed ethics content within practice courses in undergraduate social work programs in the Southeast region of the United States. The study's findings may be used by program administrators, social work faculty, and professional social work associations seeking to ensure bachelor-level social work students are prepared for ethical conduct in social work practice.

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Appendix A: Generalist Practice Curriculum Matrix 2015 EPAS Competency

The Generalist Practice Curriculum Matrix with 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) Competency. The curriculum matrix will be used to deliver the final results of the study for: 1) Competency 1; 2) the five practice behaviors; 3) course(s) (where each competency is implemented); 4) course content; (readings, module, assignment, case study, exams, quizzes, class activities, and service learning); 5) dimension(s) (knowledge, values skills, cognitive affective and processes, awareness, ethics and ability) associated with the course content for Competency 1; and 6) the type of institution in the southeast region of the U.S. (public or private).

Competency:1 Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behaviors	Courses	Course Content	Dimension(s)	Public= PU Private = PV
Five Practice Behaviors 1) Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics (COE) relevant to laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional COE as appropriate to context; 2) Use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations; 3) Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and oral, written and electronic communication. 4) Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; 5) use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.		Readings Module Assignment Case study Exams Class activities Service learning	Knowledge, Skills, Values, Cognitive and Affective Processes, Ability, Awareness, Ethics	

Source: Adapted with permission of the Council on Social Work Education (2015)

Appendix B: CSWE Generalist Practice Curriculum Matrix Approval

[redacted]
Thu 4/4/2019 12:14 PM
To: [redacted] Debra Thrower
Cc:

Hi Debra,
Please just credit CSWE either in a source line attached to the matrix (Adapted with permission of the Council on Social Work Education) or cite the source in a regular reference:

Council on Social Work Education. (2017). Sample generalist practice curriculum matrix with 2015 EPAS competencies. Retrieved from https://cswe.org/CSWE/media/AccredidationPDFs/Sample-Generalist-Practice-Curriculum-Matrix-pdf.pdf

Best regards,
[redacted]

[redacted]
Manager, Publications | Council on Social Work Education
[redacted] | www.cswe.org

Appendix C: Telephone Script

Student Researcher: Good morning/afternoon, may I please speak with [*name*]?

If the Person is not available: Thank the person who answered and asked how to contact the Dean, Chair or Director of the BSW Program.

If the Person is available: First confirm that you are speaking to the correct person.

Student Researcher: This is Debra Thrower, and I am a social work doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a doctoral study that involves a content analysis of undergraduate social work syllabi in methods of social work practice I, II, and III courses, with a focus on Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2015) Competency: 1 Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior and the five Practice Behaviors that accompany competency one.

Is this an Ok time for you to speak?

If the Person says "No" or "I'm not sure"

Student Researcher: Okay. [*Ask if you can schedule another time to talk. If the person is not sure or seems hesitant, thank them and ask if there is a better time to call.*]

If the Person says "Yes" – proceed

I am seeking to obtain methods of social work practice I, II & III course syllabi. I am requesting the sample of syllabi that will be analyzed for ethics education. Emailing the syllabi should take no longer than 15 minutes of your valuable time. The consent form was attached in the email and tells you more of what the study is about.
The deadline for the requested information is Thursday, October 15, 2020.

If the Person is interested in the study, please confirm your email to them and anticipated delivery date to expect course syllabi.

Student Researcher: Thank the Dean, Chair or Director of the BSW Program for their time.

Answer any questions they may have.

It was nice speaking with you. I appreciate your support with increasing research knowledge on ethics education in undergraduate social work programs in the southeast region of the U.S.

Thank you kindly.

Appendix D: Email Message

Dear _____,
Thank you for speaking with me today regarding my research study. As I mentioned earlier, my name is Debra Thrower, and I am a doctoral candidate in the social work program at Walden University. My dissertation research topic is **A Content Analysis of Ethics Curriculum Requirements in Undergraduate Social Work Programs.**

I have attached a consent form that explains my social work research. The research invitation will be open until October 15, 2020. I welcome your return phone call or email at your earliest convenience. I know you are very busy, and I will respect your time. Thank you in advance for considering expanding the research knowledge on ethics curriculum requirements in undergraduate social work programs in the southeast region of the United States.

Kind regards,

Appendix E: BSW Programs in the Southeast Region of U.S.

There are 149 CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work programs within 12 states of in the southeast region of the U.S.

Alabama (15)

1. Alabama A&M University
2. Alabama State University
3. Auburn University
4. Jacksonville State University
5. Judson College
6. Miles College
7. Oakwood University
8. Talladega College
9. Troy University
10. Tuskegee University
11. University of Alabama
12. University of Alabama at Birmingham
13. University of Montevallo
14. University of North Alabama
15. University of South Alabama

Arkansas (9)

1. Arkansas State University
2. Harding University

3. Philander Smith College
4. Southern Arkansas University
5. University of Arkansas
6. University of Arkansas at Fort Smith
7. University of Arkansas at Little Rock
8. University of Arkansas at Monticello
9. University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Florida (14)

1. Barry University
2. Florida A&M University
3. Florida Atlantic University
4. Florida Gulf Coast University
5. Florida International University
6. Florida Memorial University
7. Florida State University
8. Saint Leo University
9. Southeastern University
10. University of Central Florida
11. University of North Florida
12. University of South Florida
13. University of West Florida
14. Warner University

Georgia (10)

1. Albany State University
2. Augusta University
3. Clark Atlanta University
4. Dalton State College
5. Fort Valley State University
6. Georgia State University
7. Point University
8. Savannah State University
9. Thomas University
10. University of Georgia

Kentucky (14)

1. Asbury University
2. Brescia University
3. Campbellsville University
4. Eastern Kentucky University
5. Kentucky Christian University
6. Kentucky State University
7. Morehead State University
8. Murray State University
9. Northern Kentucky University
10. Spalding University

11. University of Kentucky
12. University of Louisville
13. University of Pikeville
14. Western Kentucky University

Louisiana (8)

1. Grambling State University
2. University of Louisiana at Monroe
3. Louisiana State University and A&M College
4. Northwestern State University of Louisiana
5. Southeastern Louisiana University
6. Southern University and A & M College
7. Southern University at New Orleans
8. University of Louisiana at Monroe

Mississippi (11)

1. Alcorn State University
2. Belhaven University
3. Delta State University
4. Jackson State University
5. Mississippi College
6. Mississippi State University-Meridian
7. Mississippi State University-Starkville
8. Mississippi Valley State University

9. Rust College
10. University of Mississippi
11. University of Southern Mississippi

North Carolina (23)

1. Appalachian State University
2. Barton College
3. Bennett College
4. Campbell University
5. East Carolina University
6. Elizabeth City State University
7. Fayetteville State University
8. Johnson C. Smith University
9. Livingstone College
10. Mars Hill University
11. Meredith College
12. Methodist University
13. North Carolina A&T State University
14. North Carolina Central University
15. North Carolina State University
16. Shaw University
17. University of North Carolina at Charlotte

18. University of North Carolina at Greensboro
19. University of North Carolina at Pembroke
20. University of North Carolina at Wilmington
21. Warren Wilson College
22. Western Carolina University
23. Winston Salem State University

South Carolina (7)

1. Benedict College
2. Coker College
3. Columbia College
4. Limestone University
5. South Carolina State University
6. University of South Carolina
7. Winthrop University

Tennessee (17)

1. Austin Peay State University
2. Belmont University
3. East Tennessee State University
4. Freed-Hardeman University
5. King University
6. Lincoln Memorial University
7. Lipscomb University

8. Middle Tennessee State University
9. Southern Adventist University
10. Tennessee State University
11. Tennessee Wesleyan University
12. Trevecca Nazarene University
13. Union University
14. University of Memphis
15. University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
16. University of Tennessee at Knoxville
17. University of Tennessee at Martin

Virginia (14)

1. Christopher Newport University
2. Eastern Mennonite University
3. Ferrum College
4. George Mason University
5. James Madison University
6. Liberty University
7. Longwood University
8. Mary Baldwin University
9. Norfolk State University
10. Radford University
11. Virginia Commonwealth University

12. Virginia State University
13. Virginia Union University
14. Virginia Wesleyan University

West Virginia (7)

1. Bethany College
2. Concord University
3. Marshall University
4. Shepherd University
5. West Liberty University
6. West Virginia State University
7. West Virginia University

Appendix F: Synopsis for Research Question 1 Data

Sample Syllabi #	Competency:1 Practice Behavior (PB)	Methods Level	Course Content*	Dimensions	Institution Type
1	PB1, PB2	I	R, M, A, CS, CA, E	K, V, S, E	Private
5	PB2, PB3	I	R, A	K, S, V, A, E	Private
6	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4	I	R, A, CA, AL	A, V, E	Public
7	PB2	II	A, CA, E	K, S, V, AW, E	Private
12	PB1, PB2, PB3	II	R, CA, E	K, V, AB, E	Public
15	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4	III	A, CA	K, S, V, AB, E	Public
16	PB1, PB2, PB3	I	R, CA, CS, SL, A, E	K, S, V, E	Public
17	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5	I	R, A, CA, CS	K, S, V, C & AP	Private
18	-	I	R, CS, CA, A, M	K, S, V, A, E, AB, C & AP	Public
19	-	I	R, M, A, CS, E	K, V, E, A	Private
20	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5	I	R, A, CS, CA, E	K, S, V, C & AP	Private

Sample Syllabi #	Competency:1 Practice Behavior (PB)	Methods Level	Course Content*	Dimensions	Institution Type
21	-	I	R, A, CA, E	K, S, V, A	Public
22	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4 PB5	I	A, M, CA, E	K, S, V, AB, A, E	Private
23	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4 PB5	I	R, CS, A, CA, E	K, S, V, C & AP	Private
24	PB1, PB2 PB3	I	R, CS, A, CA, E	K, S, V, C & AP E, AB	Public
25	PB2, PB3	I	R, A, CS, CA, E	K, S, V, E, C & AP	Public
26	PB1, PB2 PB3, PB5	I	R, A, C, M, CA, E	K, S, V, E	Public
27	PB1, PB2 PB3, PB4 PB5	I	R, A, M, CA, CS	K, S, V, C & AP	Public
29	-	I	R, CA, A	K, S, V, C & AP	Private
30	PB1, PB2, PB3	II	R, A, E, M	K, S, V, C & AP	Public
31	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5	II	R, A, CA, SL	K, S, V,A, E, AB, C & AP	Private
32	-	II	R, CS, CA, A, M	K, S, V, A, E, AB, C & AP	Public
33	PB2, PB3	II	R, A, CA, SL	K, S, V, A, E, AB	Private

Sample Syllabi #	Competency:1 Practice Behavior (PB)	Methods Level	Course Content*	Dimensions	Institution Type
34	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5	II	R, A, E	K, S, V	Private
35	-	II	R, A, CS	K, S, V, C & AP	Public
36	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5	II	A, E	K, S, V, A, E, AB	Private
37	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5	II	R, A, CA, SL, CS	K, S, V, C & AP	Private
38	PB1	II	R, A, CA	K, S, V, C & AP	Public
39	PB1, PB3, PB4	II	R, CA, E	K, S, V, E, AB	Public
41	-	I	R, CA	K, V, S, C & AP	Private
43	PB1	III	A, M, CA, E	K, S V, A E, AB	Private
44	PB1, PB2, PB3, PB4, PB5	III	R, A, CA	K, S, V, C & AP	Private
47	PB1, PB, 2 PB3	III	R, A, CA, SL	K, S, V, AB, E, C & AP	Public
48	-	III	A, CA	K, S, V, C & AP	Public
50	-	III	A, CA, E	K, S, V, C & AP	Private

Sample Syllabi #	Competency:1 Practice Behavior (PB)	Methods Level	Course Content*	Dimensions	Institution Type
51	-	III	A, M, E	K, S, V, C & AP	Private

Note. *Course Content = Readings (R), Module (M), Assignment (A), Case Studies (CS), Exams (E), Class Activity (CA), Active Learning (AL), Service Learning (SL). +Dimensions = Knowledge (K), Skills (S), Values (V), Cognitive & Affective Processes (C & AP), Awareness (A), Ethics, (E), Ability (AB). Italic = Discrepant Case, - = Missing PB.

Appendix G: Synopsis for Research Question 2 Data

Sample Syllabi #	Methods Level I, II, III	Course Content*	Dimensions+	Institution Type
2	I	R, A, Q	K, V, S, A, AB, E	Public
3	I	R, M, Q	K, S, V, E	Public
4	I	R, A, CS, Q, E	K, V, S, A, AB, E	Private
8	II	A	K, V, S	Public
9	II	R, A, CA	K, S, V, E	Private
10	II	R, A, CA	K, S, V, AB, E	Private
11	II	R, A, SL, E	K, S, V, E	Private
13	III	R, A, E	K, S, V, E	Private
14	III	R, A, CA, E	K, S, V, E	Public
28	I	R, A, CA, SL, E	K, S, V,	Private
40	II	A	K, S, AB	Private
42	III	R, A, CA, SL, Q	K, S, V, C & AP	Private
45	III	R, A, SL, E	K, S, V, AW, E, AB	Public
46	III	A, M, E, CA	K, S, V, A, E, AB	Private
49	III	R, A, CS	K, S, V	Private

Note. *Course Content = Readings (R), Module (M), Assignment (A), Case Studies (CS), Quizzes (Q), Class Activity (CA), Active Learning (AL), Service Learning (SL).

+Dimensions = Knowledge (K), Skills (S), Values (V), Cognitive & Affective Processes (C & AP), Awareness (A), Ethics, (E), Ability (AB). Italic = Discrepant Case.